Youth Mental Health and Music-Based Community Programs: A Comparative

Constructivist Grounded Theory Approach

by

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Dalhousie University is located in Mi'kma'ki, the
ancestral and unceded territory of the Mi'kmaq.
We are all Treaty people.

Dedication

I would like to dedicate this thesis to the twelve youth who participated – without you, none of this could exist. I hope you see yourself reflected in this project, and I thank you for your commitment, vulnerability, excitement and ideas.

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Abstract

Music-based community programs are evidenced to support youth mental health. However, the processes by which they do this, and how these relate to youths' experiences, remain unknown. Using constructivist grounded theory and an intersectional approach, 12 youth were interviewed (13-18 years of age) from three diverse community-based sites in Edmonton that use music to support youth mental health. Programs were found to be accessible, safe spaces for diverse youth which creates an environment of supported risk taking, leading to growth in musical and social ability. Groups are structured around youth choice and genuine relationships with teachers, supported by a shared love of music and the minimization of power differences. Playing music as a group in a space socially separate from the rest of their lives offers unique pathways for youth to focus, be challenged, and create reciprocal relational responsibilities, which provides 'co-opportunities' for learning and leading. These allow youth to learn more quickly, practice different social roles, and be a partner in the evaluation of their own learning. Novel elements of group experience become embodied within youths' sense of self and through repeated opportunities can extend outside of group through increased willingness to take risks and engage with challenge. Program participation can result in experiences of mental health, self-efficacy, and identity, supported by unique processes within music-based, mental health-oriented community programs. Through reducing barriers to access by providing free services targeted to meet the needs of youth, these programs contribute to social justice on a community level.

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Chapter 1: Youth Mental Health and Music-Based Community Programs: A Comparative Constructivist Grounded Theory Approach

Music-based community programs have demonstrated capacity in supporting youth mental health (Harkins et al., 2016). However, the processes by which they do this, and how these relate to youth's experiences, remain unknown. To support the discovery of these processes, this study used a constructivist and intersectional approach to interview 12 youth, (ages 13-18 years) from three diverse community-based sites in Edmonton that use music to support youth mental health. The literature review explores the connection between youth mental health and music and details proven benefits on an individual, relational, and community level from these programs. In addition, it explores the current gaps within research – a lack of process-based understanding as well as a lack of critical intersectional analysis of program impacts. The proposed research design and questions will be explored, moving to the findings of youth experience and how they relate to the unique processes of music-based mental health programs in a community setting.

1.1 Background/Rationale

The research topic for this thesis is found at the center of youth, mental health, and music-based community programming. Mental health is a significant challenge for many youth (Travis et al., 2021). This difficulty is being faced by an underserviced group and has been exacerbated by the effects of Covid-19 (Magson et al., 2021). This social problem is recognized internationally and within Canada (DeSilva et al., 2014; MHCC, 2012). Kutcher & McLuckie (2010) found that while there are benefits to early intervention, most youth do not access mental health supports when needed. This is

especially true for marginalized youth, who face greater health inequities, and rarely have access to culturally grounded services (CAMH, 2014). Youth spend more time on music compared to any other age group (Hargreaves & North, 2008 as cited in Murphy & McFerran, 2017), and musical engagement forms a significant part of their subculture (Stehlik et al., 2020).

It has been demonstrated that music-based community programs support youth mental health, however we do not yet have the research to describe why that is (Harkins et al., 2016). There is a need to compare data across multiple programs with diverse program models (Schwan et al., 2018). There is a lack of research that seeks to understand the relationship between program processes and youth experience. Although there are emerging data on differential impacts, specific analysis accounting for social location (culture, gender, social context) is underdeveloped (Harkins et al., 2016; Martin & Wood, 2017). Finally, there is a lack of strong participant voice within current research, which obscures the complexity of participant answers and is disempowering (Murphy & McFerran, 2017).

The primary goal of this study is to explore the relationship between the experiences of youth and the unique processes of music-based mental health programs in a community setting. A secondary aspect of analysis is to center youth voice by exploring how positionality impacts their experience. This study interviewed 12 youth (ages 13-18 years) from three different sites in Edmonton, Alberta. The research design selected for this study is constructivist grounded theory, using semi-structured interviews and observational data to inform the study (Charmaz, 2006). Analyzing experience in relation to intersectionality requires a design that can speak to a diversity of experiences while

maintaining the texture of the contextual details (Charmaz, 2006). Constructivist grounded theory, with a process based, comparative, theory generative focus, is well-suited to explore the specifics of individual youth's experiences, while tying together common features of experiences to support policy and program development. This emergent area of study is in accordance with an approach that is adaptive to the data, and prioritizes a creative, constructive approach (Charmaz, 2006).

This project seeks to encourage the use of music-based programs by helping to legitimize them through demystifying the relationship between youth mental health and music-based program processes. This study can serve to support program development and policy that is sensitive and responsive to the unique needs of diverse youth and has implications for programming from an educational, mental health, and music-based perspective.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

This literature review provides an overview of selected mental health benefits for music-oriented, community-based programs for youth and identifies gaps in the literature. Beneficial aspects of programming are explored through the themes of individual, relational, and community-oriented benefits, as well as considering conceptualizing access to music as a human right.

2.1 Individual

On an individual level, the literature suggests wide ranging positive effects of music-based programming, from supporting positive development in ethnic minority youth in an urban environment through critical engagement with rap music (Abdul-Adil, 2014), to supporting resiliency in youth bereavement through song writing (Myers-Coffman et al., 2020). Cain et al., (2016) completed a systematic analysis in Australia where they found that all programs reviewed provided improvements with personal, physical, and mental health factors such as a reduction in anxiety, self harm and aggression, and a better management of personal stress. Five out of six of these programs utilized a variety of different drumming methods (including DRUMBEAT and *Healthrythms*), and the other provided opportunities for youth to practice and play contemporary music in after-school bands on a wide variety of instruments (Cain et al., 2016). These programs produced additional health and wellbeing benefits such as a reduction in depression and increases in personal empowerment, confidence and self-esteem (Cain et al, 2016). In a comparative study of 35 low socio-economic status youth attending a middle school summer program, two girls and one boy, participated in an integrated "Hip Hop, Empowerment, and Therapeutic Beat Making (HHE-TBM)

intervention", where youth met individually with an instructor twice a week to explore

hip hop music (Travis et al., 2019, p.744). Travis et al., (2019) found improvements in

positive youth development, with decreased depression and anxiety symptoms through

the engagement with, reflection on, and creation of hip hop music. This mirrors results

showing that stress and depression were both found to decrease after participation in

music-based programming creating mixtapes (Levy & Travis, 2020). In a study of the

short and medium term impacts of youth participation in Big Noise music programme,

Harkins et al. (2016) found that there were individual benefits of happiness and joy

through orchestral musical participation and an increase in pride, confidence and self-

esteem through musical skill development in their chosen instrument. Schwan and

colleagues completed "in-depth interviews with a total of 23 youth experiencing

homelessness and staff at a large youth homeless shelter" regarding the arts-based

programming available at the shelter (2018, p.355). Programming included as a part of

drop-in activities a life skills program, and utilized a wide variety of arts-based methods

such as music, sculpture, and photography. They found that managing mental health,

supporting trauma recovery, self-exploration, and self-discovery were ways in which

these youth used music to benefit their lives (Schwan et al., 2018). These results are

promising, however more research is needed to understand the relationship between

program processes and the experiences of youth in these programs. Schwan and

colleagues (2018) found that many positive attributions of the arts-based programming at

the homeless shelter were already demonstrated by the youth themselves throughout their

lives. This appears to suggest that the program supported youth to do what they were

already doing well. Additionally, research showed that youths' experience with music is

multifaceted, as listening to music both benefitted them and increased their mental health challenges (Hense et al., 2018). Hense et al. (2018) found that music tends to intensify emotions and that at times youth used music in a way that enhanced their mental health, and at other times finding it leading to patterns of rumination. Therefore, while these results demonstrate many ways in which music-based programming supports youth mental health, more research is needed to develop a more nuanced understanding of how these individual benefits tie into program processes for particular youth.

2.2 Relational

Relational benefits for youth engaging in music-based programming also emerges consistently in the literature. Harkins et al. (2016) found that security, belonging, and friendship were benefits of participation in orchestral performances. Merati et al. (2019) found that there was emotional and social benefit for children with socio-economic challenges through helping to create a sense of community and building relationships with peers and family. A study considering the development of mindfulness in children through participation in music-based activities that found two themes emerged: awareness of self and others, and improved listening and attention skills (Auerbach & Delport, 2018). These are both elements of mindfulness, but also support relationship development through building on participants awareness of other people. Choi (2010) contributes that the theoretical model of group work, where youth work collectively to build their capacity as a group (common to many music-based programs) contributes to the social support system benefits of program involvement. Many articles spoke to the key importance of the development of one-on-one relationships between program staff or musicians and participants (Cain et al., 2016; Harkins et al., 2016; Hesnan & Dolan,

2017). This involves, in part, respect from participants for the skill of mentors and program facilitators (Cain et al., 2016). This fits well with what Travis et al. (2019) found, that those who use strategies relevant to the culture and lived experiences of youth are in the best position to engage youth in their development. The cultural relevance of the approach from facilitators appears to be a key element of program success. This aligns with research demonstrating the primary role of relationship development in supporting youth (Robinson, 2010 as cited in Harkins et al., 2016). One-on-one relationship development and a cultural connection among facilitators and participants appears to be both a prominent outcome as well as key to program success.

2.3 Community Oriented

In comparison to outcomes on an individual or relational level, structural or community level benefits are more rarely reported in the literature. This must be interpreted carefully, as many of the studies did not explore elements related to social justice or connection to the larger community (Murphy & McFerran, 2017; Schwan et al., 2018). In programs that were intentional in their focus on community, initial introductions between youth and the program were made primarily through professional referral from mental health clinicians (Hesnan & Dolan, 2017). These introductions are important as research has shown referral hesitancy to music-based programs such as musical therapy from clinicians can be a barrier to program success (Hense, 2018). Hense (2018) found that mental health clinicians who had a positive, strengths-based view of musical therapy were more willing to bring up the possibility of music and mental health and had higher rates of referral to the community program. This demonstrates a link between youth accessibility and the awareness and appraisal of music-based mental

health programs at a community level. Music has also been successfully combined with other elements such as sports to increase the appeal of both activities for youth and to support their development and larger community involvement (Cohen & Ballouli, 2018). Hip hop music that is culturally relevant to youth was used to support group workout classes by making it more inviting for youth to attend, both by playing music as well as inviting DJ's to play during the program. Cohen and Ballouli (2018) found that music was culturally relevant to youth and encouraged youth who had a love of music to engage in workout activities. Travis et al. explored a program model that prioritizes a sense of community, social justice, and empowerment through therapeutic beat making, which "focuses on cultural and kinesthetic elements of electronic music production" (2021, p.8). While these examples exist, it is rarer than the norm, where programs primarily focus on individual and relational benefits. A systematic review by Cain et al. (2016) found that only one third of programs addressed benefits at a macrosocial level, which is important because of the links between macrosocial benefit, program accessibility, and overall program impacts. Benefits at the macrosocial level include providing opportunities for participants to gain cultural awareness through playing music with the larger community and sought to "counteract negative influences on participants' immediate social environments" (Cain et al., 2016, p.113). It is integral to understand how to connect programs to the community. A meta-analysis of 33 studies by Farahmand et al. (2012) found that the more programs were embedded in participants' social environment, the more successful they were in improving mental health in low-income urban youth. Due to the lack of research directed in this area, it is hard to conclude why current music-based programs only rarely connect to macrosocial or community level elements. It may be a

result of the theoretical framework of either research or program design, or it could be related to music itself as an intervention tool.

2.4 Human Rights

A final theme that emerged through the literature was the conceptualization of access to culturally relevant art or music as a human right. There is an emerging recognition of art as essential to human health because of its of the potential to help connect people to culture and contribute to overall well being (Quadros, 2017). Consider Schwan et al.'s (2018) exploration of the use of arts-based programming at a youth homeless shelter which included musical engagement through workshops and self-directed musical creation for homeless youth. Schwan et al. found that art was not simply helpful – the youth defined it as essential to their lives (2018). That youth with presumably intense material needs saw art as essential demonstrates the value they place on it. Linking with this, Travis (2019) spoke about how access to culture is a fundamental human right, and shared a conceptualization in music education philosophy that culturally relevant music programming can be seen as a fundamental human right through offering a pathway to culture. In 2020, Stehlik and colleagues interviewed 379 Australian youth between 12 and 24 years of age who participated in municipally run programming in a community facility. This facility was intended to invite creative expression in youth through music and the arts in the satellite city of Elizabeth, a community struggling with intergenerational unemployment, poverty and social dysfunction. Stehlik and colleagues found that listening to and playing music forms a significant portion of youth subculture (2020). While the literature suggests music is culturally important for youth, not all have equal access. For example, in a study of musical identity with eleven youth, fifteen to

twenty five years of age, Hense et al. (2014) raised the ethical issue of lack of access to community-based music programming. Hense et al., (2014) shared that access can be limited for those with mental illness as services can be aligned to the needs of privileged youth already finding success in the community and preclude youth for whom everyday engagement within the community is a challenge. If we understand youth mental health challenges as a systemic problem, inequitable access to music-based programming is a matter of social justice (Hense & McFerran, 2017). Music can serve to facilitate connection to culturally meaningful activities, especially important for youth, who as a subcultural group hold music in high regard. While music can help connect to culture and improve mental health, access is inequitable, especially for those with mental illness, which highlights systemic barriers to access. Therefore, it appears that there is room to explore music as a human right, which underlines that accessible, participant focused, relational and culturally relevant programming needs to be at the core of effective community-based music programming. Recognizing the importance of the arts in accessing culturally meaningful experiences presents a nascent opportunity to consider access to the arts as a matter of social justice (Quadros, 2017).

2.5 Analysis

2.5.1 The Link Between Social Position and Positive Outcomes

While overall the literature suggests music-based community programs have a demonstrated capacity to support youth mental health, there is a lack of detail regarding for whom these programs benefit. For example, only two studies reviewed accounted for gender differences and these two did not include transgender or gender non-binary youth (Martin & Wood, 2017; Stehlik, 2020). Further, no studies reviewed analyzed

associations between program design, facilitation models, theoretical positions, youth positionality and outcomes. One study in Perth, Australia utilized a program designed in collaboration between an Indigenous Elder and staff from a community-based organization (Martin & Wood, 2017). The study involved 24 girls and 17 boys, between grades eight to ten from three socio-economically disadvantaged secondary schools. The program involved both drumming with djembes and therapeutic discussions, as well as a final performance (Martin & Wood, 2017). The results for boys were a significant reduction in antisocial behaviour, lower post-traumatic stress symptoms, and higher mental wellbeing (Martin & Wood, 2017). However, there were no changes demonstrated for girls who participated (Martin & Wood, 2017). The article concludes by relating their findings to the generalized benefits of musical participation – without exploring what about this program worked for the boys, and not for the girls. Recognizing this program as culturally embedded and acknowledging the lack of beneficial changes for girl participants demonstrates the need for an intersectional approach to support multi-level analysis on program impact. An intersectional analysis unpacks the intersecting social categories that position people within social hierarchies of oppression and marginalization, allowing analysis to include multiple aspects such as gender and culture (Brown, 2020). The only other mention of gender found in the literature review was through Stehlik's study that showed that in comparison to boys, girls who participated had a wider interest in creative arts but in general used the program less (2020). It was hypothesized that the proximity of the program center to the skatepark encouraged increased participation from boys in the community, because more boys than girls go to the skatepark (Stehlik, 2020). The rare mention of gender as well as the lack

representation of transgender and gender non-binary youth is an example of how a nuanced understanding of how program experiences relate to gender and positionality is currently missing.

A study by Harkins et al. (2016) found that children living in postcodes associated with low socio-economic status were more likely to attend and unlikely to stop attending an afterschool music-based program. However, they also showed that ethnic minority youth, young people who speak English as a second language, and children who needed additional supports (defined in the study as an inability to benefit from school education without additional supports) had the opposite experience – they were less likely to come, and more likely to stop coming if they did begin (Harkins et al., 2016). Harkins et al. (2016), concluded that the impacts of these types of programs are so nuanced, personal, and individual that it cannot be expected that programs will demonstrate consistent results across all participants – but it appears they were not positioned to offer an explanation for the differential impacts. Their conclusion that impacts are individualized seems to not meaningfully answer the question of positional differences as their study had found thematic differential impacts, for example for ethnic minority youth. Like Schwan et al. (2018), I argue this demonstrates the need for an intersectional approach to research as there are currently insufficient data on the differential impacts music-based community programs have on participants. The available data show that these programs appear to work more successfully for male participants, those who are ethnically dominant, and those in poor neighbourhoods. However, limitations in the research, especially regarding gender identity which is rarely mentioned (and when it is, only as a binary and for cis-gender youth) preclude a more nuanced understanding of the

role of gender in youth experiences in these programs. More research is needed to determine the role of program structure. An intersectional lens is preferred to simply exploring the effects on particular populations (for example, a particular cultural subgroup) given that an inclusive focus on music and creativity in programming has allowed for diverse groups of young people to be recognized for their skills and has offered unique opportunities for relationship development (Hesnan & Dolan, 2017).

2.5.2 Program Structure

Overall, there is a lack of evidence on the impacts of program structure on participant outcomes. One aspect that did emerge was the importance of youth ownership in programming (Cain et al., 2016; Hesnan & Dolan, 2017). Specifically, Cain et al. (2016) found that involving youth in decision making is a key way to incorporate needs and interests of young people. Hesnan & Dolan (2017) found that youth ownership is integral to program success and can be facilitated by staff intentionally creating an inclusive space that is conscious of adult power and youth empowerment. Once adults do not dominate the space, but are approachable and there for support, youth will gravitate to taking ownership of both governance and content through increasingly taking on leadership roles in creating group opportunities (Hesnan & Dolan, 2017).

The rest of the data provide conflicting evidence and only one study directly compared the style of structure in relation to outcomes for youth. Hesnan & Dolan (2017), in exploring the impact of a café style, youth drop-in center that used music as a primary program tool, spoke to the importance of the space being informal, non-directed, and interest based. The one study that directly compared facilitator style looked at three different methods – expert led (authoritarian), semi-structured (democratic), and informal

(open) program models (Levy & Travis, 2020). They found that the greatest reduction in stress and depression occurred through a semi-structured, democratic model where youth voice and choice were prioritized within a framework created and facilitated by the adults in the environment (Levi & Travis, 2020). More comparative research could facilitate a more nuanced understanding of the relationship between the experiences of youth and program features of music-based mental health programs in a community setting.

2.5.3 Methodology/Theoretical Framework

There is a methodological limitation of the research itself through the rare use of participant voice. Murphy and McFerran (2017) overviewed 27 studies in relation to the effectiveness of music-based interventions on youth with disabilities and found that only eleven studies included participant voice; and of those the majority was in the most recent four years of the review (2013-2017). This points to a current gap and emerging trend of including participant voice in research. Participant voice is key, as participants and those around them do not always agree on the level of program impact. Of the eleven studies that included participant voice, five considered social benefit of program participation. In each of these five studies the youth themselves consistently rated the social impacts of the program higher than their workers or the facilitators, demonstrating the importance of prioritizing youth voice (Murphy & McFerran, 2017). Examples of these social impacts are participants developing friendships and enjoying being part of groups (Murphy & McFerran, 2017). Ensuring research is centered on data generated from the youth themselves allows a more complete understanding of the impact of music-based programs. Additionally, participant voice is needed as youths' relationship with music is layered. For example, in the study by Hense et al. (2018) participants reported at times

being helped by music, and at other times music compounding difficulties. Another study interviewed 40 youth aged 13-20 and explored how they conceptualize the impacts of listening to music during challenging times (Mcferran & Saarikallio, 2014). Mcferran & Saarikallio (2014) found that most youth saw impacts from music as strongly positive, even though some of their experiences contradict these views. More research is needed, from a youth perspective, to help understand how music-based programming interacts with youth to provide particular outcomes. Centering youth perspective fits well into using an intersectional approach to consider program impacts through allowing youth to share aspects of their positionality that are salient to them. This study seeks to contribute to knowledge development through taking a youth-first, qualitative approach that uses intersectional analyses to explore meaning.

Chapter 3: Research Questions

The gaps in the research can be broadly summarized into three different categories. First, there is a lack of research that explores the mechanisms of program structures relative to the experience of participants. There is a need to compare data across multiple programs using different program models (Schwan et al., 2018). Second, there is a lack of specific analysis on the differential impacts of these programs based on identity and positionality. This challenges the validity of generalized statements on the benefit of music. Third, there is a lack of participant voice within current research, which obfuscates the complexity of participant experiences and is disempowering. To avoid a dichotomous approach to music and youth mental health, more research is needed that is on these three facets, which has led to the development of my two research questions:

- What is the relationship between the experiences of youth, and the unique processes of music-based mental health programs in a community setting?

- How does positionality (culture, social location, context) influence the experiences of youth within mental health-oriented music-based community programs?

When taken together, addressing these two questions will help to provide increased information regarding the relationship between program processes, youth positionality, and youth experience. This will provide increased understanding on how these programs interact with youth and their mental health.

Chapter 4: Research Design

The research design selected for this study was a multisite qualitative approach using 12 participant semi-structured interviews, from three diverse music and community-based sites that support youth mental health. The data were generated and analyzed using constructivist grounded theory as developed by Charmaz (2006). The study was designed to explore the interaction between the processes of these programs, youths' experience relative to their mental health, and how these experiences are influenced by their positionality.

4.1 Constructivist Grounded Theory

While many challenge the hegemony of the medical model and logical positivist research traditions within youth mental health research there remains a lack of participant focused, data grounded approaches (Murphy & McFerran, 2017). Youth are placed as an outsider to the process of knowledge creation and program development and are often not included in decisions that affect them (Jack.org, 2019). As this project sought to construct an understanding of the relationship between the processes within music-based mental health programs and youth experience, a design that allowed for the experience of youth to have primacy within the data was paramount. Constructivist grounded theory holds value through prioritizing youth voice by being flexible and sensitive, and building the results around interview and observation focused data (Charmaz, 2006).

As this is an emergent area of study, taking an adaptive approach has value in supporting the development of a nascent concept. Emergent areas of knowledge are well-suited to an approach that can form itself around the data and prioritizes a creative, constructive approach, common to constructivist grounded theory (Charmaz, 2006).

Additionally, taking an intersectional approach that considers the influence of positionality on youth experience requires a design that can speak to a diversity of experiences while maintaining the texture of the contextual details. Constructivist grounded theory, with its comparative, theory-generative focus, is well-suited to both explore and maintain specifics of individual youth's experiences, while tying together common features of experiences to support policy and program development.

While constructivist grounded theory discourages the use of prior theory in data interpretation, as the categories are to be generated from the data itself with limited preconceived notions, a selection of theories have been used to sensitize the researcher to certain topics (Charmaz, 2006). This included intersectionality from a feminist-narrative approach (Brown, 2020), which informs an analysis of power, position, and youth experiences. The exploration of the relationship between youth and their environment was guided by an ecological approach (Bronfenbrenner, 1994) which contributed to the understanding that options for experiences, narratives, and actions emerge as processes that tie together individuals and their environments. Epistemological constructivism (Maxwell, 2013) grounded the understanding of participants' construction of their experiences and the importance of focusing on youths' ideas to see their underlying epistemological constructions. In part, this involves a recognition that youth may utilize epistemological constructions that are unique to their context and points to the need for research findings to be built closely upon the data shared by youth rather than fitting their ideas into preconceived adult-oriented theories or assumptions.

4.2 Population and Sample

This project interviewed 12 youth between the ages of 13-18 years from three different sites (four per site) that use music-based programming in a community setting to improve youth mental health. This age range was chosen to align with common age ranges for youth and mental health services in Alberta. There were six girls, three boys, two gender nonbinary and one transgender boy and the average age for of participants was 15. To ensure accessibility for participation in the project and due to challenges with verbal communication, one youth, Stephanie, was supported in her interview by her mother. Consistent with constructivist grounded theory, this sample size allowed for in-depth interviews to achieve the goals of the project without needing a large representative sample and is conscious of time and resources needed to complete the project (Charmaz, 2006).

The three sites selected are based in Edmonton to allow the researcher to observe sites in person. Participating sites were the Youth Orchestra of Northern Alberta - Sistema (YONA-Sistema), Semitones Children's and Youth Choir (Semitones) and Sarah McLachlan School of Music (SOM). All sites seek to support youth musical ability as well as their mental health and wellbeing, and all target youth who may otherwise have barriers to access. YONA-Sistema was selected as a participating organization as it uses highly structured and holistic programming and uses music to support mental health and wellbeing in youth.

> "YONA-Sistema is…modeled on the ground-breaking *El Sistema* project in Venezuela which uses music for social change and teaches the values of unity, harmony, and mutual compassion" (YONA-Sistema, 2023).

Semitones was selected as it is an all abilities, inclusive community-based choir that seeks to improve youth mental health and sense of community with a comparatively open structure to the other two programs.

> "The Semitones Children's Choir…aims to have fun while learning music and movement basics and is inclusive of all ability levels. The group also strives to integrate children of all abilities and build leadership, acceptance, confidence, and promote expression" (Semitones, 2023).

SOM offers programming for youth to improve their musical skills as well as well-being.

> "SoM's mission is to strengthen…well-being…by providing barrier free access to the transformative power of musical learning, expression and community…building communities where all can experience connection, personal growth, and well-being through equitable access to supportive, creative, and inclusive musical learning and expression" (SOM, 2023).

To support considering diverse perspectives the sites have been selected due to the uniqueness of group processes as well as participant diversity.

4.3 Recruitment

Participants were selected through partnering with YONA-Sistema, Semitones and SOM to find interested youth. Staff were briefed on the importance of avoiding undue influence or tying any program related benefits to participation in the study. The diversity of youth was supported by diverse site selection. Initial recruitment was completed by the primary researcher attending a group session to present the study and provide the information letter, contact form and nomination form. All program

participants who were interested in participating in the study had nomination and contact forms signed by their parents/guardians as well as themselves.

4.4 Data Collection Methods

To provide for an in-depth understanding of youths' perspectives of their experiences, intensive, semi-structured interviews were the primary data collection method. Interviews were completed on site at each community-based program within a private space to ensure participant confidentiality. Interviews were booked prior and during program times to ensure accessibility for youth and reduce barriers to access. Interviews ranged from 22 minutes to 90 minutes, with an average of 50 minutes. With participant permission, interviews were recorded so they could be transcribed verbatim, both to ensure the accuracy of the data as well as to reduce note taking during the interview to make it more comfortable for the youth (Charmaz, 2006). Observational data were generated through fieldnotes by the primary researcher to support a contextualized understanding of youths' experiences. The websites of all service providers were explored as secondary data to guide an understanding of the goals and intent of the programs. Focusing primarily on interview data directly from youth ensured participant voice came through the data and was contextually relevant to youth (Charmaz, 2006). In keeping with constructivist grounded theory this approach also allowed for the exploration of emerging themes to support the development of emerging data categories (Charmaz, 2006). Taking a critical approach to the concept of saturation, and being mindful of time, Dey's (1999 as cited in Charmaz, 2006, p.114) concept of "theoretical sufficiency" was used in place of saturation in data sufficiency decisions.

4.5 Data Analysis

Data were analyzed through a constructivist grounded theory approach by first coding interviews. Open coding was used as a technique in initial coding of interviews to ground the emerging categories in the data and ensure "fit and relevance" (Charmaz, 2006, p.54). Observational data were analyzed through incident-to-incident coding, by coding and comparing observed activities, events and processes to help elucidate themes (Charmaz, 2006). At this point, the analysis moved to focused coding and memo writing to seek to tie codes together into more abstracted and theoretical statements (Charmaz, 2006). By placing a priority on process analysis in coding, processes and their relationship to youth experience were explored (Charmaz, 2006). This supported the development of increased understanding of how the patterns of program processes relate to youth's experience and contributes to the development of theoretical considerations (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

The impact of positionality is specifically suited to a grounded theory approach, as it allows for an in-depth understanding of participants' experiences to be developed, sensitive to context and culture. A constructivist grounded theory approach maintains the uniqueness of individual experience while coding for thematic and theoretical considerations which allows for answers to emerge in ways that deepen knowledge, are true to participant experience, and can pragmatically inform program and policy development through positional and thematic consideration of the data (Charmaz, 2006).

4.6 Strategies for Rigour

The strategies for rigour for this study were focused on maintaining coding categories consistent to the voices of participants. First, rich data were generated in interviews and observations. A semi-structured interview style allowed for the co-

creation of detailed data that was adaptive to the epistemological and narrative constructions of youth participants. The use of detailed observational data as well as conversations with staff provided triangulation and contextualization of interview data. To support the development of rich narratives, transcripts were audio recorded to maintain accuracy and were transcribed verbatim. The multisite design of the study allowed the researcher to explore themes that are more broadly representative of youth experience rather than site specific. Recognizing the role I play in generating data, my biases as the primary research is acknowledged. The identification of themes and codes are influenced by my biases and professional limitations, including professional experience in supporting youth mental health, the use of creative methods in supporting mental health, personal experiences in music, and life experiences from a cis-gender, white male perspective. In support of the validity of results, the development of initial coding, analysis and writing were supported by the Thesis Committee which comprised of Dr. Michael Ungar (Primary Supervisor) and Dr. Marion Brown (Secondary Supervisor). Recognizing that research reflexivity is an important aspect of qualitative research, my biases and limitations were critically considered throughout data collection and analysis. I engaged in reflective practice (often during walking meditations or yoga) to explore my positional relationship to the development of categories to ensure coding categorization remained closely aligned to interview data from participants. To support centering youth perspectives, categories were sought that reflected thematic concepts generated by the youth.

4.7 Limitations

From a standpoint of representative sampling, these results cannot be generalized to the larger population. However, considering the data generated by grounded theory seeks to discover relationships between processes and youth experience to create a substantive theory, the elements and patterns generated can inform policy and program development. That said, a small sample size remained a limitation in this study. While this study does not seek to provide people with the *right* program decision (which would be specific to the setting they are in), it does seek to support asking the right types of questions of program development to maximize the elements that support accessibility and having a positive experience within these groups, specific to their positional needs.

4.8 Ethical Considerations

4.8.1 General Ethical Considerations

There were a few ethical aspects considered during data collection. Concerns regarding subtle coercion is a relevant ethical element regarding asking young people to participate in research, due to relationships with adults who matter to them. This was addressed by having a conversation with partnering agencies regarding the expectations that there be no pressure or access to program resources related to participation in the study. Additionally, during semi-structured interviews, the researcher ensured no leading questions were asked (Please see Appendix A: Interview questions appended). If a need arose for emotional supports after an interview, the youth were to be referred to back to their program organization. Research participants were offered $50 gift cards of their choice to recognize the time they committed to the project. This amount was chosen as it served as an acknowledgement of the value of their participation and demonstrated reciprocity within the exchange rather than assuming that youth are a free source of

research information, consistent with the intent of the study. The compensation was available at the time of interview for any person who participated.

4.8.2 Informed Consent

All participants were provided with written information about the study including an information letter and nomination form. Once participants indicated an interest in participating in the study by returning the contact and nomination form, the consent form was sent to the parents/guardians. Youth were provided, in writing, procedures of the research, tasks they were to be involved in, the risk and potential benefits of the research, and their right to withdraw, prior to their interview. At the time of the interview consent was overviewed and the youth were given a chance to ask any questions Any youth under 18 required a guardian signature.

4.8.3 Limits to Confidentiality

Identifiable data will be used in research publications and presentations where participants consented to attribution. This decision was made keeping in mind the importance of participant agency over their information, how it is shared, and giving space for the direct acknowledgment of contribution. Consenting to attribution was optional and not a requirement for participation in the study. Direct quotes were used under a pseudonym for those who did not consent to having attributed quotes to protect from disclosing the identities of these participants.

Chapter 5: Findings

These findings review the experiences of youth participating in community-based music programs and explore how their experience relates to program processes while considering how experiences are influenced by positionality. The sections that follow are organized sequentially, following the path of what the participants shared about their experiences of the program, in other words, the '*what*'. Each experiential section is then followed by my analysis of what processes encourage and support those experiences; in other words, the '*how*'. The first section details accepting, safe spaces and the relationship with teachers. Next, processes and program structures that support these experiences, such as the use of power, are explained. Participant experiences of social and musical benefits will then be explored. Specific program processes that contribute to these benefits, such as separation from the outside world and co-opportunities for learning and leading, will be delineated. These experiences of safety and social and musical benefits support a positive sense of mental health, sense of self-efficacy, and identity formation in youth which will be explored in relation to program processes and youth positionality. The findings section also considers how music-based community programs contribute to social justice.

5.1 Accepting, Safe Spaces

5.1.1 Acceptance of Diversity

I would first like to acknowledge that the concept of safe spaces is contested, as no spaces can be considered fully safe as safety relates to identity and power (Ludlow, 2004). However, consistent with constructivist grounded theory, result categories are built upon the data, and the diverse participants in this study spoke about the space as

consistently safe, therefore the coding of 'safe space' is used as it aligns directly to their experiences. The three programs included in this study actively embed acceptance into program processes that are adaptive to the needs of diverse youth. This includes aspects surrounding musical choice, processing their feelings, and identity considerations such as gender identity. Clear and explicit commitments to diversity and acceptance mattered to participants, who shared that it helped them see the space as non-judgemental and fun, and contributed to their feelings of being included and supported. Diversity was defined by participants as a variety of differences such as culture, gender, and class, but also individual differences, such as personality. Diversity of participants creates a sense of inclusion, as Andre shared – "oh there are so many different people…it's not limited to a certain kind of person, you don't feel like left out or different…if your personality or anything is uh different". Including diverse demographics and personalities supported group cohesion as participants shared that their confidence in and shared enjoyment of the program increased through seeing diverse peers succeed. Additionally, the inclusion of a range of youth, such as those with disability in Semitones, changed the experience of participants who attended, with Kelsey having shared that developing a relationship with youth with disability gave her a sense of purpose at her program and supported her in feeling more grateful within her own life. The programs are mindful of the inclusion of differences. For example, Riley shared she is the only participant from the public school system rather than Catholic, and they are mindful of this in programming. This results in youth feeling understood, as Stephanie's mother shared: "all [teachers] have shared understanding about like children or any people with special needs; they understand each people is unique…rather than in a typically like group settings that sometimes people

don't understand about their needs… here she's completely comfortable because everyone treat her equally like, they understand each other."

Programs adapt relative to youth's capacity, most consistently by providing participants choice to adapt the program to their emergent needs of that day. For example, at SOM, youth can choose their instrument and switch if they do not like it. If they want to perform a rap song with lyrics that are not a good fit, they are encouraged to change the lyrics. If someone is struggling with their part in a song, their teacher can always find a way to ease the problem. As Phoenix shared, his teacher was able to rewrite the bassline for his band-mate "on the fly" which helped them past where they were getting stuck. If participants seem to be having a difficult day or not doing well, a teacher will see if they can help by offering a break or see if they want to do something less challenging for the day, for example by changing songs, instruments or activities. At all three programs, if someone needs a break, they take a break. Semitones is especially adaptive, and if someone is feeling off, the activity will be changed. If focusing is a challenge that day, perhaps they will go to a new song or engage body movements while singing. YONA offers larger group time and individual or smaller group practice. During larger group time there is less flexibility to change the activity but still an ability to take a break if needed or talk to an instructor. In individual or smaller group practice youth choice is an important feature of deciding how to move through the day's activities. Centering youth choice relative to capacity is a consistent way each of these programs remain adaptive to participants. The data suggest this supports participants in feeling that it is a safe space and one in which their needs matter.

A crucial adaptation that supported youth in feeling safe and seen for who they are at their program is adaptation to shifting gender identity. When Elliot came out as gender non-binary, he felt immediately accepted. The program staff responded by actively working gender acceptance into their programming which they did through making an explicit effort to not ignore that Elliot is queer by finding gender neutral bathrooms whenever they are in a different space. Elliot also shared that the program staff changed their name on program material and corrected people on pronoun usage – even at a donor event. When Elliot came out as a trans man, they worked out program processes that supported that too, for example by just having youth he was mentoring call him Elliot rather than using Mr or Ms as is the standard in the group space during peer mentoring. Another participant shared that the staff use their correct pronouns and do not use their full name. These experiences of acceptance and active adaptation of program processes allows these youth to feel accepted and seen within their program. This allows them to explore their identity in ways that may not be possible outside of the program, as demonstrated by one participant who goes by a different gender identity at home and at their program. Specifically, Sam stated that it was a safe space, and agreed that this is different from other places they are in. Three participants interviewed for this project were gender non-binary or trans, and each spoke about being able to be who they are in the program and know they are accepted as key to knowing it is a safe space. It appears that programs being a safe space – while important for all participants – is integral for gender non-binary and transgender youth as reflected by the consistency, detailed delineation, and overall importance placed on safety as a feature of program experience.

All three programs are accessible for different skill levels. A participant from SOM shared that the program is for everybody of every skill level, there is no skill discrimination which allows everyone to be themselves and engage in music. Teachers do their best to curate the lesson to fit the needs. Lynn described it as "so beginner friendly but yet not also a beginner-only environment", which conveyed for them that the organization is a place for a variety of skill levels. Semitones is an all abilities choir that allows for youth with a variety of different musical skill levels to participate, sing, and move their bodies together. YONA has three tiers of orchestra, everyone begins in the Junior Orchestra and progress based on their skill progression. Programs do not just accommodate, but actively embed into programming the ability to help those with differing skill levels progress in a shared environment. This communicates to participants that they are accepting of and interested in everyone having a place within their programs which contributes to the sense that it is a safe place, and a place where they are accepted.

These programs center participants' needs within program expectations and processes, and by doing so create a program that is adaptive to the needs of youth, even and especially when it requires active effort. These are the aspects that create a safe space for these youth. Prioritizing their needs and recognizing them for who they are sets the foundation for relationship and skill development.

5.1.2 Developing Genuine Relationships with Teachers

A consistent theme related to programs as a safe space is the genuine interaction style and relationships that are developed with program staff. Participants invariably shared an overarching positive sense of teachers' demeanor, even when things were difficult. During the pandemic when it got harder to attend, Lynn shared that "the part

that just kept me coming was the vibe of the teachers". Participants described teachers as nice, memorable, and a lot of fun compared to other places, most often school. As Andre shared: "All the teachers they are high energy, and they uh really like being there you can definitely tell…they enjoy using their time to teach people how to learn instruments and learn songs". He continued: "none of them seem annoyed or bothered, and even when, like they have bad days… [they're] still just super pumped to be there… even when we're being a little bit annoying with him". This consistency is echoed by Lynn as he described it as a "very welcoming space, everybody has great energy, I don't think there's a single time I've shown up and someone was like off [and] it made me feel like now it's not the day…I've felt welcomed every time". This excitement was a consistent theme that mattered to participants through showing that what they were doing was important. Participants spoke frequently about a shared love for music, and seeing teachers' passion and excitement to teach, conduct, and play music. I posit that these genuine interactions are supported by a shared love for music that allows for unique relationship development that feels different than most power-over relationships with teachers they have had. Youth shared that genuine relationships are a key part of the program's value to them as it helps them feel welcomed and learn better, supporting both social and musical development. My site-based observation is that teachers shared a dedicated interest in the pursuit of music in their lives. Their love for music is genuine and grounds their relationship with youth. Participants from all programs spoke about how the love for music from their teachers is contagious.

Youth shared that teachers demonstrate that they are genuine by being high energy and excited to teach. Participants at YONA spoke extensively about teachers'

genuine excitement in seeing them succeed. Sophie from SOM shared that teachers'
"bring themselves down to your level…it makes me feel safer here…yeah you like feel
the difference between school and here like obviously there they like check up on you but
like here like almost feels a bit more genuine". These interactions from teachers are
described as acting as "almost a friend, but as a helper too" (Sophie), and described their
interactions as a general respect that goes both ways. Participants felt like staff
"understand that they are a person and not just a child that they have to take care of or
teach" (Lynn). Mutual respect leads to youth feeling seen and cared about which helps to
develop a sense of trust and makes them feel welcomed. Participants shared that teachers
have purpose when they talk which aligns with teacher activities such as checking in with
youth, adapting expectations based on what they hear and going out of their way to start
conversations and help participants pursue their interests. As Lynn shared, they "can talk
to Enoch about bass whenever [even though he's not their teacher], and he went out of
his way to bring in one of his basses so I could see it and mess around it. Most teachers
[in other programs Lynn has been a part of] wouldn't go out of their way to do something
like that and he went out of his way to bring one of his instruments because I mentioned
wanting to try it".

5.2 Supporting Accepting Spaces and Genuine Relationship Development

5.2.1 Use of Power

Through accepting diversity and providing genuine opportunities for relationship
development, these programs communicate to participants that the programs are centered
around their needs. An element that emerges alongside and helps to elucidate youth
characterization of relationships with teachers as genuine is how power is used within

programs. The rules, and use of power to support them, appear to be focused on prioritizing a socially positive environment, often juxtaposed by participants to rules that support a learning-centric environment. This leadership style appeared to allow much of the leading to be done through soft power, where teachers use their power in service of developing intrinsic interest in music from participants and participants gravitate towards listening. This lessened the need for more traditional expressions of adult power. As Andre shared: "[our teacher] just starts talking about something and we just listen to him. I dunno, I think it's just he has a good attitude so people just want to listen to him". Interactions with teachers supported a welcoming environment, providing participants with an opportunity for recognition and genuine relationship. This approach appears to fit the needs of youth who attend and communicates early-on that the expectations of interaction within this space, especially regarding the use of power, is different than in other areas of their lives. Participants often compared the power-with relationships and adaptive nature of these programs to other, more rigid, aspects of their lives primarily in school and also at home. Sophie said that "you can like have real conversations with them, it's not just like them telling you what to do, or like how you can do better, it's like you can talk about different things you can…voice your opinion". Youth shared the teacher does not have to walk around the room a lot to manage behaviour, which I interpret as participants feeling that power is used sparingly. As Phoenix shared, "if you like doing your own thing while somebody else is trying to learn something…you're not going to get scolded for like not listening every three seconds". The use of power also extends to not being graded while in the space – "it's nice to know that you're going there and you're not getting graded so there's no pressure on you to like, if you do not

figure it out in the uh time that he said to" (Andre). Andre shared that "there's no passing or failing in this class, which I enjoy a lot, and it's way better…because there's more freedom in the class that people take more risks, and actually uh try different things". Sam reflected that at YONA they do not feel the need to do things perfectly on the first try. Participants shared that there is less pressure, fewer formal expectations, and it is as open as it can be while ensuring a positive social environment. As Sophie shared, "this is really like anything goes as long as you're like being careful and being kind and everything like that then you're good". There is a balance of focus on social and musical development through a lack of formal evaluation mechanisms which allow youth to focus more on developing themselves and taking risks rather than navigating the needs of those in power.

5.2.2 Clear Teaching Style

Another exemplification of how relationships with teachers support youth needs emerges from an accessible, clear teaching style. A participant from YONA spoke about how they can do some things better for others than themselves and find it easier to complete learning tasks if their teacher is clear and expressive in relation to what they want him to do. Elliot shared that he found the clarity of expectations and positive pressure from teachers, "where you know that they want you to succeed", helped him to fully engage with the program. At YONA, the program is organized as playing as a group, playing one's individual instrument, and theory, which offers participants different ways of learning and also supports one-to-one feedback from teachers. At Semitones they use an iterative teaching style, where repetition is used alongside breaking down challenging sections into smaller pieces. Participants learn the skills they need to play the

current song (words, melody, hand or body movements), and practice these pieces until they are ready for the next step as determined by the conductor. Youth are supported by their conductor in areas that are a challenge, for example singing loudly. In addition to the scaffolded opportunities for learning new skills, Semitones is adaptive to the needs of individual participants, often by providing moments of one-on-one support for hard sections, changing songs or warmups, and offering youth a chance to take a break when needed. The inclusion of diverse capacities means that it is rare that multiple participants need one-on-one support at the same time. Additionally, the ability to provide one-on-one attention is provided through small overall group size as well as the use of youth volunteers. To support clear teaching the conductor makes many decisions for participants however they are made in service of youth needs and implemented with flexibility.

At SOM, Andre shared that "the way they teach music, they make it super simple" which allows participants to start playing quickly, learning what theory or skills you may need along the way. He contrasted this to his experience of a school classroom where "there's a lot of unnecessary information and they tend to prolong things that don't need to be prolonged". When youth first come, the teacher chooses the song (seen as helpful by participants as it cuts down on time to start playing), shows them how to create the chords and shares the names of note. Over time participants learn more as they play through the song, quickly moving to selecting their own songs. In this way, the program provides a structure for the participants to begin playing quickly, then as they progress offers them more choice, which reflects how the structure meets the needs of youth in an adaptive way – providing leadership when needed and otherwise supporting youth in

exploring music themselves. The approach is song focused and based on learning the skills needed in that moment. Described by Phoenix – "they like completely ditch music theory almost" in this example by first explaining the hand-shapes of chords before moving to learning what note it is. He contrasted this experience to learning in other environments where he feels that he is expected to learn theory before developing tactile and auditory understanding. Phoenix found that this teaching was accessible and made it easy to go from not knowing how to play to playing every day. The learning style at SOM appears to provide instant gratification through quick access to instruments and playing that supports buy in from participants. The development of technical and theoretical skills come as needed, guided by what is required to play the next song. Over time as participants start to choose songs which means their technical and theoretical learning is in service of their song choices – the opposite of their other experiences in musical education ("this is way different than any normal class I've ever been in… I don't think I'd be able to, in a normal like piano lesson where it's like, a strict piano teacher, I don't think I'd be learning", Andre). Providing participants with interesting opportunities right away and seeking to develop 'player-musicians' offers a unique learning opportunity that appears to work especially well for youth who have self-identified challenges with learning in other environments. During site observation it became clear that teachers would prioritize playing over theoretical understanding and spoke about music as a lifelong pursuit. Teachers would explicitly seek to develop player-musicians by focusing on skills needed, such as playing along with a song by ear and developing the ability to understand the structure of chord progressions in popular music with the intent to facilitate playing music. Youth shared that the structure of

education is often a site of power contention within school, and juxtaposed this to the alternative way of learning provided in these programs which is supported by clarity in teaching, thematically present in all programs.

5.2.3 Program Structure

While there are varied depictions of program structure across the three sites of this study, there is consistency in the structure working for participants as it matched to their context, needs and personalities. What appeared to matter the most to youth was the application of the structure more so than the structure itself. Participants who were younger or had disabilities tended to have more structured programs, and those who were older tended to have more choice. This appeared to fit participants' needs through providing them with a balance of a challenging environment that was aligned to their developmental needs. While the specifics of structures varied according to who participants were, all programs applied a structure that offered youth choices relative to their capacities while honouring their need for agency. Interestingly, at times even the same program can be described very differently by participants. For example, in the SOM program, Lynn described it as a "very flexible structure", whereas Phoenix described it as "towards more structured". My analysis is that there were varying depictions of the structure as the focus of the program's structure was on meeting each individual's unique needs, thus the structure was experienced distinctly. The structure worked equally well for participants with diverse needs as a key aspect of the application of these structures is to maximize youth agency.

YONA was described as "pretty structured," (Judy), which fit their needs as it helped things to be orderly and get them into a routine that helps structure their week.

Participants shared that though there is always a plan, if they can't do it, staff will figure out alternatives. This balance of a plan and adaptation was key for participants in feeling that the structure met their needs. Another example of this balance is selection of instrument: instruments are selected due to orchestral needs, and youth choice contributes to song selection and how to complete practice and small group time. The structure adapts to individual youth development as well: Elliot shared that his opportunity for choice in the program has expanded as he has aged, for example he is now invited to choose which days of the week to come. YONA's structure supports participants in a holistic manner by providing snacks as well as time for homework, thereby demonstrating their intent to support participants beyond musical education and with consideration to their specific needs. This can be integral in creating an environment youth want to be in as demonstrated by Sam: "[t]hey said there would be music and food and I was like, I got free time."

Semitones is comparatively more structured in terms of the conductor choosing what they will do that day, but very adaptive in response to the needs of the participants in the moment by taking breaks or changing songs. Participants shared that their conductor chooses the songs which they love, and that they are often told what they can do when they come to the program which they like. This structure meets the needs of these youth, who may need more guidance on aspects such as choosing a song, but also benefit from increased flexibility in the way that structured is applied so that the day can look quite different depending on how things are going for the participants. In this way, youth choice was prioritized, aligned to their capacities and preferences. Semitones uses the terminology of conductor to align with language norms within some choir settings,

however this formality is not reflected in the leadership style which, while more directed than other programs, remains adaptive to the emotional and mental needs of youth participants.

SOM was described by participants in a varied way (see the introduction paragraph of this section) however was the most open program structure with youth choice featuring prominently. All participants agreed that there's always a plan, "but they're very chill about the plans" (Andre). Sophie shared their leader usually gives ideas for songs which they often do not end up picking – it is not that they do not want to do what their leader suggests, but that they come with their own ideas and this usually gets the most votes. While teachers might put in boundaries around song choice, they are implemented with flexibility, for example, participants wanted and were able to perform a Nirvana song for children and just needed to make a lyric adjustment to meet the teacher's boundary of appropriate lyrics. Participants expressed that their need to be heard was balanced with the needs of the program. As youth progress, the group ends up picking songs and the structure becomes increasingly guided by youth. SOM also provides snacks with one participant Lynn having shared that it is a key part of the program for them, and although it is a small thing they shared they "sometimes even forgo lunch whether intentionally or not intentionally…and it's nice to just be able to know that there's granola bars". SOM providing snacks is one way in which they meet the needs of participants with a focus on youth living in poverty. While snacks are something that is easily overlooked, it was relevant to youth who participated both through offering concrete benefit of food as well as being another example of program decisions being made in relation to participants needs. Having snacks is another way

SOM shows youth that they matter and that their care towards participants extends beyond musical education. The flexible application of structure demonstrates how power is used by adults within these programs in youth centered ways that adapt to meet their needs while provided scaffolded skill-based learning opportunities.

5.3 Positive Social Experiences

Having experienced the programs as being a safe space and having a sense of belonging, participants shared they had positive social experiences. The degree to which this impacted participants related to their own relationship to being social outside of their program. For participants for whom being social is a challenge, positive social experiences were very important, and linked to improved mental health and sense of self-efficacy. For participants who shared their social needs outside of their program are comparatively more met, being social at the program kept it fun and interesting but did not relate as readily to changes in other areas.

5.3.1 Friendship and Social Value Inside & Outside of the Program

Forming friendships and being social in the program is very important to the participants interviewed, with Lynn having noted that there is an overarching theme of people coming for the social aspect. Many participants shared that talking to friends is their favourite part of attending the program, adding to their enjoyment and being a space for identity development. For some, like Sophie, music got her attention to come, but the people kept her coming. She said that she would not see the point just to come, play music alone and talk to the leader. For her, friendship is the essential reason to come.

For some participants for whom friendship and social environments are a challenge, this program offers a "fresh start" with people. Sam shared that outside of the

program, they are not very well liked, and described the program as a great fit for lonely kids as it is an opportunity to meet a lot of new people. This experience of making friends has impacted them through thinking that "not everyone is a piece of trash", which has changed the way they feel about the world: "it has some hope in it" (Sam). Participants stated that a shared love of music supports quickly building relationships, moving past initial social nervousness and finding shared purpose in playing music together which prompted social interactions early on in the program that facilitated relationship development, crucial for youth who struggle socially. Many participants found their programs to be a more positive social environment than other areas of their lives. Being in a different social environment and feeling a sense of connection supported youth in taking on different social roles. For two participants this involved moving from a habit of social passivity to more leadership-oriented actions. Riley said "it's nice because they like, they listen to me whereas for example my friends at school they're so many people that most of the time I'm the person on the outside just listening". Hearing participants talk about finding the world "has some hope in it", and taking on more leadership roles begins to demonstrate the linkages between social experiences, mental health and an increased sense of self-efficacy.

For these musically inclined participants, being in a music-centered space supported social benefits through offering genuine conversations when talking about music to others in their program. Multiple participants related to peers as "we're all the same but different at the same time" (Riley), mostly reflected in a variety of life experiences and personalities, but a shared love for music. It appears that difference and commonality were equally important to participants. Seeing different youth participate

supported participants in feeling that the program is a welcoming space for all and that they too would be included. A shared love of music offered a connection point for relationship development. This tension of 'all the same but different' provided participants with meaningful and unique social experiences. A common theme in relation to peers was that "[normally], no one gets it – but then when I'm here, they get it" (Riley). Participants often shared being self conscious and needing to regulate how much they talk about music outside of their program as well as a general dissatisfaction with the depth of the conversation they were able to have. This experience precluded aspects of social development as youth felt different from their peers which produced feelings of separation and stress. Comparatively, program experiences provide participants with an opportunity to be present and connect with people more deeply about what really matters to them in an open way rather than try wonder if they have been speaking too much about music. For Andre, this connection is supported by observing peers' relationship to music as he enjoys watching people participate and have a good time listening and making music. He feels music, and how emotional people can get towards music, is "kind of a deep thing that some people may not want to show". Andre shared he has a friend in the program who is "serious, isn't a soft guy", and seeing his connection to music and emotions helps Andre feel like "people are still people, and they still feel". Andre said that it is not something he would talk to his friend about, but something he enjoys seeing, silently to himself, as seeing his friend enjoy something makes him feel closer to him as well as supports his own mental health through the appreciation of the humanity and emotionality of others. Music is something that helps youth connect to others in unique ways.

When friendship within the program was a challenge ("Well friendship is not easy because I don't know anyone", [Osman]) especially true in this study for participants with disabilities (two of three participants with a disability shared this as a challenge), a social opportunity for social benefit is provided by being around others (experienced by all three participants with a disability). One participant from Semitones, Osman, shared although he finds friendship a challenge, coming to the program gave him an opportunity to "give happiness to everyone and…make a joyful laughter". Osman shared that he feels "amazing" towards others at group through "loving people being people". The shared musical connection provides an opportunity to do something in which they feel no different than each other, while still being different from each other. For participants with disabilities this was a rather unique experience in their lives as demonstrated by Stephanie. Stephanie is a youth with autism who often finds social connection to be a challenge, however when she is at Semitones she feels that she is no different than other people as they are all singing together and doing the same thing. Stephanie's mother shared that Stephanie has a desire to connect socially but her disability makes it a challenge to make or maintain friendships. She shared the example that Stephanie does not know the appropriate topic to start a conversation. Yet in a music setting she can make friends through using music as a pathway to connection, as the notes, rhythms, and melodies connect the emotions, so that she could communicate. For Stephanie, most of her classmates in her specialized school program are boys; her program is a unique opportunity to see and connect with girls her age through singing together and not feeling different than them. Singing together is not just an opportunity to do the same activity, it is an opportunity to share in a collective experience and feel a shared sense of identity.

This sense of belonging helps to balance her emotions through relieving the stress of a lack of connection to others. While the expression of social processes and their meaning shifts in relation to participants' identity needs, the social aspect and friendship-oriented elements within the program are a key aspect of youth experience within their program – often juxtaposed to their experiences of social challenges outside of the program.

5.3.2 Fostering of Community Through the Support of Teachers

As noted by Elliot, a key aspect of the program is "the support of all your teachers…everyone really knowing you, that, is really essential, and yeah…just the community that they are trying to foster". One way teachers foster community is through including a mentoring component at YONA, and a volunteer component at Semitones. At YONA, older participants were partnered with younger youth new to the program. Teacher feedback is key in supporting mentoring relationships. Elliot was partnered with a youth with high needs and a teacher provided feedback pointing out that the youth listens to Elliot differently than he does with other teachers. As Elliot shared - "I was really struggling with it for a long time, I felt super stressed about it [the mentoring relationship], and then I was like – oh… oh? You think I'm doing this well? I guess that must mean that I am…all of these people are telling me that I'm doing this right…he listens to me in a way that he doesn't listen to them, it's like, maybe this is working…". This is often how the participants spoke about the support of the teachers – they come when needed, and in crucial moments to help participants continue to progress in the program. After this feedback, Elliot became more confident in themselves and their mentoring, which has become an increasingly important part of why they come to the program.

Peer-to-peer relationships are fostered through teachers introducing participants to each other when they first come, being placed in a group with the people they would be in class with, and making sure people are not left out (for example, if someone is alone, a teacher will come up to engage them). These actions by teachers helped to demonstrate early on to youth that this was a different space than they had been used to (for example: that people would not be mean if they made a mistake, that people are kind, that participants are supported socially). Positive social experiences within these programs are supported by modelling by teachers as well as ensuring participants are introduced to each other and supported in the creation of their relationships.

5.3.3 Novel Social Opportunities

There are novel social opportunities offered to participants, especially within YONA and SOM where through performances and donor events (YONA) participants meet adults from a variety of backgrounds, including those who are famous (Sarah McLachlan, Natalie McMaster), local government (the Mayor of Edmonton) and wealthy donors. These experiences allow participants who come from more modest backgrounds to interact with and consider themselves in relation to adults with power. This is exemplified by Elliot having shared a time where he performed at a donor's fundraiser birthday party and felt that wealthy people are "so separate from me…you are so rich that you don't… want things". Elliot shared that "this is so much, you guys are so separate than the kind of life that I lead, and it's like, unimaginable, like, you would have set, like they did set foot in my elementary school, like they were, they were original donors there". Elliot shared that he "didn't realize the discrepancy until I could understand class", and that "the social impacts of the program really hit me as I got a bit older." At

times, this can bring some tension as Elliot shared "when I go play at like rich people events, which they have me do, and I like talk casually like a person, and they laugh… it's like – have you never heard a joke before?". However, it also brings benefit – "they are so different… but also I'm like, you are going to open me, you have already have, opened me up to things that I never would have had before, like there is no way have that they would have got twenty violins for my class without these rich people, and it's like, oh, clearly, like you guys…understand, like that people need things". These experiences have allowed Elliot to learn more about their own class and positionality.

Lynn shared the experience of performing for Sarah McLachlan and the Mayor of Edmonton helped reinforce some of their thinking as he missed a note in the performance. Lynn asked Sarah after the performance if she noticed, and "she's like no, even if I did, I wouldn't have cared". Lynn felt that this reinforced their understanding that "people care a lot less than what you think and… the energy that you put out in the world comes back to you". This thinking extends outside of the program, as Lynn gave an example of being self-conscious on the bus "like I'm going on the bus with a plastic shopping bag, right, and then, me feeling like, like oh this is so weird", but realizing that if they acted like they were supposed to be there it would no longer be weird. Lynn said that at the point of performing for Sarah they were "already in that mindset, and just hearing it from Sarah… it's reinforcing, and it made me feel pretty good to know that…she enjoys it". Lynn's example demonstrates how narratives around social acceptance are supported through experiences in the program.

Novel social opportunities through program participation offer youth from poorer backgrounds a chance to interact with adults with power which supports their own

consideration of class and contributes to their conceptualization of social acceptance and relating to others. While not all youth who participate in these programs have the opportunity to perform at events like this, it creates meaningful and novel experiences for those that do, especially those who come from poor neighbourhoods.

5.4 Positive Musical Experiences

5.4.1 Playing as a Group

Programs provided participants access to unique group musical opportunities such as singing in a choir, playing in an orchestra, and playing instruments. Elliot shared that he would have never known playing music in a group was of such interest to him had he not had the opportunity to play in the orchestra. Playing together is important for participants, as Lynn shared they thought they learned more in individual lessons, but believes music is a social thing and so enjoys learning to play as a group as it prepares them to play music with others. Multiple participants shared that playing instruments was their favourite part of the program.

Playing music in a group allows for social interactions, and specific skills are needed, for example keeping rhythm. This creates a consistent conversation of sorts, where group members negotiate aspects such as rhythm in a continuous way. There is a reciprocal nature inherent in playing music in a group, and one participant from Semitones mentioned that her favourite part of singing in choir is the back and forth of singing/sound. Participants found there is a unique energy when playing in a group that is encouraging as everybody likes to play music. Multiple participants mentioned that when playing in a group other people amplify the sound and it becomes more than what can be done alone. Aspects of playing in a group allow for particular musical experiences: "it

feels like everybody is connected at once, we're all like working towards this one thing, and it's just, it's a great feeling" (Phoenix). An opportunity to play as a group allows for youth to experience these specific elements they may have not without the program.

5.4.2 Learning, Challenging, Accomplishing

Program participation provides opportunities for learning musical skills in a safe, youth driven, inclusive environment where participants are interested in and able to improve their skills. Participants were challenged in a variety of ways, by learning a new technique every week, working on instrumental skills, new songs, following the beat, musical theory, learning to play in a group, as well as how to prepare to play instruments like exercises and deep breaths. The participants in this study often labelled learning musical skills as their favourite part of the program, representing a core reason many youth chose to attend and a mechanism through which they can challenge themselves. Osman, a participants from Semitones shared that "well learning new songs is pretty difficult, but if I keep going, I still love it". He shared that this results in him feeling happy, even when it is hard. This sense of moving through challenges leading to positive feelings is reflected by participants across the study. While the experience of challenge offering a sense of achievement was widely shared, it related somewhat differently to different participants. Those who were older tended to relate overcoming challenges in group to overcoming challenges in life outside of the program by helping to give them a sense of momentum ("You kind of just feel like there's this invisible force kind of helping you", said Phoenix), allowing them to feel like they are really good at something, and feeling smarter ("I learn something new that could be difficult…it feels really good and it makes me feel like I'm smarter", Andre). Those who were disabled and younger

tended to speak more about how it felt good to practice, as Sophie shared: "I get to like play this instrument that I don't have at home and play with it, yeah makes me happier". These participants also focused on aspects of overcoming within the program, as Keltie shared about singingly loudly, which was a challenge for her: "[I] use my voice…I sing loud to Susan". Additionally, playing instruments was a key aspect for these participants as demonstrated by Sam "Favourite part? Playing the instruments all with each other", however they did not as consistently relate it to life outside of the program or internal processes, such as self-conception.

Participants shared it is easier to try hard and learn new skills in their program as everyone is there to learn. As Phoenix shared, in other spaces (such as physical education in school), they stood out when they tried. In the program, "it's great because everybody is so ready to do something, and everybody is trying their hardest" (Phoenix), which made it much easier for the participants there to try their hardest as well. Supported by site observation, having a shared commitment to learning also confers pragmatic benefits such as a reduction in interruptions and effort needed from teachers to support those who are disinterested. Notably, it also does more than that: it creates a social environment that encourages engagement.

Challenge provides motivation for some participants, as exemplified by Phoenix. He shared that in music there is always something harder to play, and even with "massive achievement", there is always a next goal. Phoenix shared he became habituated to overcoming challenges in group which extends to his life outside of the program. "[O]n the very first day, I stretched my fingers like so far out, and it was horrible, and for like an entire week I just practiced that, so the next day, the next week, it wasn't even that

difficult…every other time I'd do something crazy it wouldn't feel that crazy." He found

that "when you face something like difficult everything else just seems easy" which has

extended to him finding it easier to do "everyday things you know, like taking out the

trash, even waking up in the morning". He internalized the experience of overcoming

challenge during the program which is now embedded in different areas of his life. He

described the momentum - "a feeling, it's definitely a feeling. You kind of just feel like

there's this invisible force kind of helping you…you're not the person that's running,

you're kind of sitting in the little buggy behind… once you've already ran the way

somebody else comes in and helps you, you get like a horse to do it again." This sense of

momentum in his life emerged from his repeated opportunities to overcome challenges in

the program, which was a place in which he was passionate (music), fit his learning style

(learning by doing), fit his learning needs (youth-centered adults who use their power to

support participants in developing intrinsic interest in music) which resulted in the

development of a sense of self-efficacy.

Repetition of challenge allows for aspects of youth experience in relation to group

processes to become internalized by relating to their sense of self as demonstrated by

Andre. He shared that he does not have good grades in school but at the program he can

learn, and "I enjoy and thrive off feeling that I can actually learn it and be able to I guess

figure it out you know". This ties into his sense of self ("joining the program I've learned

so much…I've felt better about myself and it's made me feel like I'm really good at

something you know") and self-efficacy ("it's really nice to know that I can actually like

learn something, and be a part of something and just have a good time with it…knowing I

can actually do it"). He shared that through this program he feels smarter and better about

himself which extends to him being more prone to make decisions that could be hard, like taking a modelling class - "if I hadn't had that much confidence I don't think I would have been able to do something like that". These experiences are reliant in part on unique processes of community-based music programs rather than being inherent in musical training itself as Andre shared that he does not think that he would be able to learn as well as he does in his program in a normal piano lesson. Repeated opportunities to be challenged and learn musical skills in a supportive environment intersects with gaining confidence and a sense of self-efficacy.

5.4.3 Teacher Supporting Musical Development

Teachers actively support learning by explaining things thoroughly, giving visual examples, providing clarity of expectations, and by teaching skills iteratively on an as-needed basis. At choir and orchestra, the consistency of conductor actions and warm up exercises helps participants to quickly catch on. As always, small groups makes it easier to get help when needed. Teachers are there to support participants through common barriers to playing music such as perfectionism, which can inhibit practice. Teachers provide emotional support one-on-one as needed while students are practicing as well as support through teaching techniques that holistically considered both technical and emotional aspects of practice. During site observation at YONA, this was evident as teachers went out of their way to make sure participants were not holding themselves to impossible expectations by reminding them before practicing a section the importance of being kind to themselves, and asking youth to reaffirm their commitment to not being perfect. Teacher feedback supported moving through challenges and were linked with elements of self-efficacy for youth. Participants shared that the active feedback teachers

provided was key to having a sense of progression as they would be told they are improving and much better than last week. Phoenix shared that for "your flaws, it's like a general reminder to do better, and then …your accomplishments really feel like accomplishments when you're being told like you're doing great", and this is unique to the program for him. Phoenix's experience of 'really feeling the accomplishments' appears to be related to the adult reification of the social value of youth actions, important for everyone, but especially key for youth who may not consistently have this experience, such as those who find school challenging. This experience supported Phoenix's emotional integration of external skill development.

5.5 Supported by Unique Processes of Community Music-Based Mental Health Programs

This section will explore the unique processes that support participant's experiences of social and music related benefits within their programs.

5.5.1 Separating From the Outside World

For most participants, the program is socially separate from the rest of their lives which initially was socially challenging. However, once relationships were formed, having the space separated from their lives outside of the program offered many advantages. As Sophie shared, having the program filled with people from different schools offers her the chance to meet new people, which added fun and made it unique to come to group, as the program is the only space where they see one another.

Four participants spoke about how programs being socially separate benefited them by offering a space for themselves, away from the social 'drama' outside of the program (often school related). Riley spoke about how coming to YONA allowed her to

build relationships and have social experiences without worrying about how it may relate to school peers, and found that she is happier there. Elliot shared similar experiences, finding "it was just like, entirely separate from all of that drama, it was just – here". Elliot was reminded of a time when there was a lot going on in their friend group, he turned off notifications on his phone and participated in orchestra, pushing through feelings of not wanting to do it. Once the day was done and he checked his phone and found "I'm so much more level-headed about all of this. I'm so much calmer…it doesn't feel like it was added on top of anything, it felt like it was entirely separate and I could just like level myself out a little bit." Similarly, Lynn shared that when they were in a toxic relationship and felt obligated to constantly text their partner, the program "would give me an excuse to just be me for a little bit" and not have to text them. Now no longer in that relationship, Lynn shared that the program "gives me more time to be me in a space that I'm used to people being me". The separation of the program from outside spaces was a purposeful delineation for Sam, who shared how they intentionally curated this separation: "I don't talk about YONA at school, I don't complain a lot at home, I don't talk a lot about YONA at home either". They feel itis important to keep separate because "one place is happy, one place has a bunch of different emotions" (Sam).

Experiences of the program being a separate social space helped these participants to keep perspective when under social stress and offered new narrative opportunities on social situations. It offered participants a chance to have a break from social responsibilities outside of the program, and offered them an opportunity to develop themselves in a supportive environment where they feel known for who they are.

5.5.2 Co-opportunities for Learning and Leading

A unique process of reciprocal relational responsibilities inherent in playing music in a group setting creates 'co-opportunities' (defined as opportunities that happen at the same time) for learning and leading in group. Unintentional and minute variations on aspects such as tempo and volume demand musical negotiation that is reciprocal as participants can hear and be heard. Participants have a responsibility to contribute to the sound, as Lynn shared: "there's no freeloading in music with other people - you have to play your part" and explained the relational nature of music making through describing it as an "intimate experience". The most consistent example of learning/leading is through the negotiation of sound between youth while playing. Participants shared that by following those around them it is much easier to tell when they are off in timing or key, and to get back on track. As everyone is sometimes on, sometimes off, the group processes shift participants seamlessly between learning and leading roles in a thousand small moments. This also happens intentionally, by youth asking each other which part or notes to play if they get lost. Participants shared that this experience of relying on others and have them rely on them occurs both in practice and performance. Varied skills and instruments played supports this learner-leader environment as youth who have more skill in a particular section or on a particular instrument helped those who had less skill. These relationships are not static as there appears to be a considerable amount of intravariability of skill depending on the context or song.

These co-opportunities for learner-leader experiences offer participants a chance to learn more quickly, and also allows them to move through social positions and practice different social roles. Noted in site observation at all three programs, there is a high degree of repetition when practicing music, which promotes embedding these instances

(for example, novel opportunities for leadership) into patterned themes, and from there to identity considerations of participants both within and outside of the program. They can be right or wrong, at any moment, and it constantly shifts – the flexibility required to play music in a group supported them in mental flexibility outside of the group, especially in relation to perfectionism (see section 5.7.2). Crucially, as noted during site observation and through interviews, participants can define for themselves if what they are playing is right or wrong – because they can *hear it.* Even when teachers give feedback, they can verify *because they can hear it and are making the sound*. This juxtaposes with the power-identified-success traditional in other environments (such as school), with tests or assessments often being formalized and externalized from them. This feedback of playing in a group to Phoenix is the difference between feeling he is accomplishing something ("we all play together it sounds great") and feeling doubtful or uncertain ("just sitting in my room, not really sure if I'm doing things correctly"). The feedback appears encouraging for participants to consistently practice as well as push past challenges, such as self doubt. As youth provide this kind of feedback to each other while receiving it themselves, it exemplifies how the thread of learner-leader is woven throughout group experience.

The ever changing roles of learner-leader need to be negotiated across different aspects of musical playing, both within youth themselves as well as within their group. So, this opportunity for learner-leader also creates a unique process in which they are at once a part of their own evaluation, partnered with teachers and peers, and engaging in the evaluation of others. This allows them to have more agency within their learning, and may be uniquely suited to youth who find learning by relying on the expertise of the adult

in front of them (who participants shared often makes sure they feel the power difference) a challenge. Co-opportunities for learning and leading appears to meet the developmental needs of youth, who exist within the tension of being seen both seen as dependent children and as independently responsible – often in relation to the needs of adults around them (Hokanson et al., 2020). These groups provide the opportunity to navigate the tension of learner-leader in a new way through the power to contribute to their own assessment and feedback mechanisms.

Co-opportunities for learner-leader experiences are embedded as a part of program structure in two programs, with Semitones having a volunteer component and YONA having a mentoring program where older youth mentor younger youth. These two programs seek to support participants in their mentoring and volunteering roles. Elliot described their approach to mentoring as being a "learner of teaching". This phrasing suggests that the thread of learner-leader remains consistent in structured opportunities in addition to open ended experiences at YONA. Through experiences of teaching, Elliot developed a deeper understanding of the teacher-learner relationship which has extended to changing their own expectations of how they want to be treated as a learner. Specifically, Elliot spoke of seeking increased recognition of agency and increased explanations when in the position of learner as a direct result of noticing how helpful this had been when they were mentoring others.

5.5.3 *"Engaging All Senses at Once"*

The participants of this study varied in their experiences of being able to focus in their lives. Riley, Sam and Judy found it rather easy to be focused across their lives, especially in school, and became frustrated with classmates who were not as interested in

learning. These youth came to their musical programs and appreciated the shared

environment where others wanted to learn. Yet the majority of participants spoke about

challenges in focusing outside of their program, especially in the traditional learning

setting of school. All participants said that their musical programs were a place that they

found easy to focus in, including two who have ADHD who shared that being focused is

usually a challenge. All participants felt like music demands focus especially when

learning a new song, preparing for performance, or doing multiple things at once such as

singing and playing an instrument. Additionally, as group spaces are often loud with

conflicting sounds Judy shared "it's a good practice to do your own thing while someone

else is doing another thing". Youth shared that music is not something that is on the back

of their minds – musical engagement takes focus.

Participants found music to be engaging, which supported experiences of focus in

all three programs, but was especially important for youth with disabilities. Stephanie's

mother shared that in a group setting it is easy for her daughter who has autism to get

distracted, but music can help keep her focused. This, then, allowed her to connect with

others. This capacity built over time as Stephanie's mother said that "normally the

rehearsal takes about one hour so most often she will just run away, back and forth, but

gradually she becomes more interested in singing because she can follow the people

more. Now she can sing throughout the whole session… Sometimes she still becomes

impatient but knows that it's a music setting and that she needs to stay there all the time,

and she can stop and follow, yeah, the whole class". Osman from Semitones shared that

"I love it, singing is my favourite thing to do, but normally I watch TV, TV is like boring,

singing is much better… every time I watch TV I fall asleep, but music helps me, I start

singing and watching TV at the same time". Musical engagement supports being able to focus, which allows for meaningful social interactions for participants who find connection a challenge inside and outside of their musical program.

A commonly shared experience across participants is that music engages all of their senses. Elliott said, "something I've noticed recently, is like it engages all of my senses at once. I can read it, I can see it, I can feel it, I can hear it…it's just like, all of that, and it's very good for my brain to like calm me down, get me in a better place". Lynn shared that music "interacts with all four parts of yourself [mental, emotional, spiritual, physical], and that is just something that personally makes my life a lot more full". Osman shared that his music program "I feel like dancing all the time, can't stop wiggling my knees". Holistic engagement of different senses and parts of themselves was consistently linked to participants' conceptualization of their mental health, as Elliot shares: "I come tired and I come stressed, but if I like, make sure that I come…it's like, it's there. I sit down, in my place in the orchestra, and I wouldn't have to think about any of that, for like an hour. I can just focus and be like – I have to play the right notes, I have to pay attention to where we are, know where we are, read it off the page". Elliot shared that when overwhelmed with responsibilities outside of the program he can be hesitant to attend, but if he does attend, being there adds to his capacity rather than takes away from it. Music engaging all senses, paired with group separation from challenging social environments provides participants with a consistency of experiences. Elliot sums this up in saying 'if I come, it's there'.

Phoenix reflected on the theme of focus, elaborating on music as a pathway to different and unique state of being. He shared that playing music as a group takes him

into a different zone of acting or thinking and compared it to a runners high, having said

that: "you hit a point where everyone is playing together, your brain just clicks, I dunno

you either like focus harder or something happens…it's like sitting in the lazy river and

the draft is carrying you down…you really only feel it when there's like multiple sounds

all together at once, when everything fits together." He shared he has only ever

experienced this with music. He described: "It's just like warm all over, everything is

just, I dunno, you just do, what you couldn't do before, you're like locked in,

hyperfocused". The ability to do what could not done before, and finding that things click

and focus demonstrates an intersection between focus and self-efficacy.

The experience of being fully engaged supports experiences of mental clarity. For

example, Lynn described his brain as feeling a lot more active and punctual after playing

music. He shared that there have been times "where I'll show up to Sarah's

school…exhausted…it kind of like refreshes my brain and I feel more mentally focused".

Lynn goes on to explain that "it clears mental fog…it's kind of like the mental equivalent

of like taking an ice bath… you feel more alert afterwards, because you've been having

to focus on something for quite a while as opposed to just sitting there, like there's a

difference between existing and living, and you can… go into playing music in the

existing state and then come out in the living state". Playing music moves participants

from passive to active, from disengaged to engaged, and through this engagement they

can do what they could not do before.

Focus, effort, and holistic engagement, which playing music in a group helps to

facilitate, provide for the development of a sense of nascent capacity, engagement, and

mental clarity. Needing to focus allows for a mental reprieve from participants' lives

outside of the program, and allows them to engage holistically which helps them to feel clearer, calmer, and helps change from feeling tired and stressed to refreshed and focused. This experience of focus appears to be readily supported by the attendance to general mindfulness practices within the program of needing to stay in the present moment and focusing on things non judgmentally as they come. Focus and holistic engagement can be transcendent experiences – "moving from existing to living" (Lynn) and "you just do what you couldn't do before" (Phoenix). If they come to the program – it's there. Music provides a setting that facilitates focus through engaging the senses. This engagement leads to experiences of clarity and calm.

5.6 Positive Sense of Mental Health

A positive sense of mental health can come from experiencing social separation, mental clarity from music engaging all the senses, co-opportunities for learning and leading, and a sense of accomplishment from learning challenging skills, supported by social and musical opportunities at the program. Youth experienced a positive sense of mental health both within and extending beyond their program. An important theme in relation to positive mental health experiences occurred from having something to look forward to.

5.6.1 Looking Forward to Something

As with most themes, looking forward to something related to specifics of participants' contexts and needs. Most youth look forward to both the musical and social aspects of their program. Participants with disabilities emphasized this more than participants without disabilities and shared that it makes up a large portion of what they enjoy doing, and so they thoroughly look forward to it. They shared that it helps them

connect to other people in their lives by giving them something to talk about. For participants aged (13-15), and those that go to YONA and attend three times per week, looked forward to their musical program in part to relieve boredom and give structure to their week. These youth shared they look forward to their program at all points during the week. For participants ages (16-18), who attend once a week and in this study also had their social needs fulfilled compared to the younger group, found that their musical program provides a constant and something nice to look forward to if they are feeling down, but is not as fundamental. Andre shared that they get excited the day before their program, but not the whole week, and described group as "just, it's there, and we have a good time with it". The consistency of positive experiences in their program helped it to always be something they can look forward to. Knowing they have their program to attend helps when they are down or struggling because they can say "we're almost there, we almost have something to do" (Riley). Sam shared that having something to look forward helps to create a sense of hope in challenging times.

Phoenix exemplified how coming to the program provides for a focus on futurity, because always looking forward and waiting for the next thing helps him speed past schoolwork onto practicing, which he does three hours a day. He shared that by always looking forward, he is always pushing to get there quicker, and that he is a lot happier having something to look forward to. Even on days off, he always tries to practice for the next program day, to push more towards his goal; practicing helps things click into place, musically and emotionally. This happened quickly: in about five months of coming to the program he moved from never playing an instrument to having practice ground the structure of his week. Having something to look forward to created a variety of

experiences for participants dependent on their context and needs, and was one of the most consistent experiences that relates strongly to a positive sense of mental health outside of the program.

5.7 Sense of Self-Efficacy

Resulting from unique processes of music-based community programs, and the positive social and musical experiences common to attendance, participation opens up opportunities for different ways of acting both inside and outside of the program relating to youth developing a sense of self-efficacy. These opportunities do not emerge immediately, but rather grow over time through having positive musical and social experiences. Opportunities for new and different ways of acting were seen as positive by the participants, and helped them take new risks, develop new relationships, or move through previously challenging items. A theme that emerged was how these programs are well-suited to counter perfectionism.

5.7.1 Self-Efficacy Through Countering Perfectionism

An inclusive, supportive environment that is firm on the need to keep playing, supported by tactile and auditory feedback within a context of reciprocal relational responsibilities, appears to create an environment well-suited to challenging perfectionism. Five participants shared that making music in their programs intersected with them being more willing to accept imperfection as a matter of necessity. Youth shared that when playing music (at any time, but especially within a group) it is important not to stop when a mistake is made: you have to keep going, to maintain timing. During site observation it was noted that the ability to continue to play even when a mistake had been made was one of the initial aspects of learning to play with others. Through repeated

opportunities to meet reciprocal relational responsibilities by continuing to play even when mistakes are made, participants are able to confront feelings of perfectionism which often extends to their lives outside of the program as exemplified by Riley.

Riley shared that perfectionism is a challenge for her. She shared an example that when writing, "if one letter doesn't match the other font, it's war". She finds that she can get frustrated quickly, but when she is playing music, she cannot stop and correct, she has to keep going and let go of that perfectionism. Her words – 'you have to keep going', reflects the language used by teachers across all three programs to support participants to keep playing after making a mistake. Riley shared that sometimes it is good to practice something over and over, but recognizes that she has to stay balanced, and cannot just keep practicing one part. Speaking to her group experience, she shared "it helps a lot because that would be something where I'd be like oh you shouldn't have, you shouldn't have done that or you shouldn't have said that, and now it's like, it's okay, I make mistakes, like even, people would tell me that before but, as much as they would tell me it, it wouldn't click or anything, but now that I can really like understand it, it's helped a lot. I've really understood it because now it's like well you can't stop if you're, if you're performing and you're in the middle of the stage, you just gotta keep going, if I've got a project that I'm doing, I can't just keep redoing something, I have to pick up the pace and make sure that I finish it." It appears that repeated opportunities to confront perfectionism in a context supported by teachers and with responsibility to others in the program supported Riley in helping it 'click' as she has been able to integrate her intellectual understanding that making mistakes is okay with emotions and actions through the group process.

This integration has extended to her life outside of the program, for example group projects at school. At the end of last year Riley "absolutely refused" to work with people as she knew she would get upset at them for doing something or she would forget to do something because she would get stuck on doing it perfectly. While she still finds group projects challenging, she shared she was really open to it this year. She was able to shift from projects "need[ing] to be perfect, whereas now it's like I wish it was perfect but it's okay, it's fine, everyone's different." She shared that it has changed her relationship with other people, though others still remember her as wanting to be perfect. In group projects, people are "still like, 'Riley, chill out', but like now they kind of like… it's better now". Riley shared that perfectionism has been a long term struggle for her and in five months at her music program she feels that she has progressed well.

Helping to work through perfectionism supports Riley in feeling capable of working through challenges, and it also allows her to practice intensely on her instrument which contributes to her sense of a powerful identity. "When I first started playing my instrument and I got to bring it home, I came, I was the last person to join this year, um, I'm now the, like out of my group I practice so much that I'm ahead of the group". She shared "I like to be good at things, so I practice stuff to be good at them, and I like, I'm a person who likes to be on top, I'm the person who likes to win things, yeah, so, I practice so that I can be amazing, and I like to be amazing". The program offers her a pathway to develop a powerful sense of identity through practicing and seeking excellence.

Through opportunities in the program to work through perfectionism supported by reciprocal relational responsibilities that were supportive, group oriented, and repetitive, participants are given an opportunity to use music as a tool to change their relationship to

practice, performance and perfectionism through the theme of 'you have to keep going'. Considering how appropriate and scaffolded exposure to anxiety-producing situations can be helpful in reducing anxious response (Pittig et al., 2021), music-based community groups provide repeated opportunities to approach and overcome emotionally and mentally challenging experiences such as perfectionism.

5.8 Identity Formation

Participants in this study reported experiencing changes to their sense of self as a result of participation in their music program at group that extended to the consideration of their identity. These included feeling more resilient to internal (such as self-consciousness) and external (such as negative assumptions by peers) challenges. A changing sense of identity intersected with other changes, such as mental health benefits from program participation. This section shares two specific changes: feeling special, and feeling "not-dumb" (Sam). The section concludes by highlighting stories of two participants in order to elucidate how participation in programs has contributed to their changing experience of identity.

5.8.1 Feeling Special

Kelsey shared volunteering in her program helped her experience herself as more special than she originally thought she was. Specifically, volunteering helped re-orient a bad day or, if she said something she thought was mean, helped her to feel that she is "sometimes nice". Group provides an opportunity to create a more positive sense of self through giving. Kelsey shared that it "makes me feel more, better I guess, and like, even if people say mean things, it doesn't mean that it's true". Aligned with this experience is Riley's depiction, presented in 5.3.1, of often being on the outside of social groups at

school however being listened to by peers in her program. These experiences have altered her self-conception of her social value and altered her social role through an increased ability to contribute socially. Experiences at the program that contribute to identity are resilient to pressures from challenges in their lives outside of group, and therefore helps to develop a powerful sense of identity.

5.8.2 'Not Dumb'

Experiencing a different social environment supports participants' reconsideration of themselves and others. As Riley said, coming to the program helped them find themselves and think that not everyone thinks that "what I say is like dumb or… that like I'm not always messing up what I say like most of the time I'm not, but I think I am". Sam shared that their experiences of social acceptance at the program has resulted in them feeling 'not dumb'. It's notable that both youth talk about not being dumb, rather than a more positive sense of confidence. This appears related to their context as they struggle in social situations and in thinking that they are not constantly making mistakes or doing things wrong. This seems both supported by their social context (both participants shared those around them often finding fault in what they do) but also by their self conceptualization, of being conscious of the potential for judgment. Being around people who are kind to them helps them feel not dumb, and having different experiences supports a reconceptualization of their thinking that can problematize their assumptions (and a lot of their previous experiences) that people constantly feel that they are messing up and are dumb – which helps to build resilience to social challenges outside of the program. Riley shared that the experience in group has "helped a lot with knowing that some people just don't take things in the same way". Sam shared that when

people are being mean "I just think of this place, say hey, that person's wrong… people here don't say mean stuff and they're usually right". Confidence in peers and staff at the program supports these experiences, and both youth shared that through feeling not dumb they are more willing to be social with peers and engage with school by answering questions in class for example. These are ways in which positive experiences in programs support a changing sense of self and others which creates resilience to social stress outside of the program.

5.8.3 On Becoming a Horn Player

Since coming to the program, Sam shared that their sense of self has shifted. When asked if how they would answer the question 'who am I?' has changed since coming to the program Sam shared "Uh, I'm not saying who is Sam and then answering, 'a dumb person'". When explored, Sam shared that since coming to the program, they would answer "a horn player". They described the change as "very nice. Um, I've never actually thought about myself as Sam the horn player until now, so, uh, I guess it would boost morale"

Through the interview Sam came to realize that their sense of identity had changed. They were conscious of how the program had changed things for them - through boosted morale, it is easier to do things. A new risk Sam has been taking is talking to people. They now think more positively about how their friends react when they talk, they are more willing to talk, and they feel like it has allowed increased connection with their friends as they do not feel like everyone is going to turn around and start laughing as soon as they talk. However, until given an opportunity to consider this in identity terms, Sam had not realized that this had shifted – it was a process that existed

between them and the program that appeared to create this shift, extending to actions outside of group.

It appears that for Sam, the process of change initially started when they first came to the program and experienced it as a safe place. Like other gender non-binary youth, safety was a key aspect of programming that set the foundation for other benefits. Through feeling safe, Sam was able to develop relationships with staff and peers that were different from relationships they had outside of the program – primarily through being seen as someone who is valuable. These opportunities offered Sam the ability to adjust their sense of identity in such a way that was resilient to outside pressures. As Sam shared, if they feel someone is assuming that they are "wrong" or "dumb" outside of program space (like at school), they remind themselves of their program and that people do not think that there, and that they are usually right. In this way, Sam's newfound sense of resilient identity is supported by continued positive interactions within the group space.

5.8.4 Finding Myself Again

Riley's experience at the program has helped her to find herself. When asked if being a part of the program has changed the way in which she considers her mental health, Riley shared: "Um, definitely. I found like before hand especially during COVID my mental health was like, really bad, and then like it started to come back and then it got worse, then came back, and then I came here, and it, helped a lot because especially like before Covid I had my old school and I had music class and stuff like that, and even though people, not everyone got it, but that helped but then Covid really, I found for a lot of people, I talk to everyone and their like, it, and you see all these people and they're

like they're in a worse state than they were before Covid and it's really sad. But I've found that during that time, like I kind of in a way lost myself, but like once I came here, I kind of found myself again because I remember oh yeah, this is who I am, this is what I like to do, and I was able to do that." Riley shared that finding herself again helped "my emotional side a lot because it's broughten me up a lot, um, I'd say like, I can be like more who I am because I have this time where like, I kept like, trying to find like, different ways of like who I am, like I'd make something my personality that wasn't but I thought it was. Whereas when I came here I was like, right I forgot about that". In addition to helping her find herself again, having a dedicated musical space helped Riley socially because as she shared, music is all she talks about, and now being in a space where her interest is shared "for me it's like, like it felt sadder before but now it's like the world's good again, you know". For Riley, playing music in a group reminded her of her deep love of music, and helped her to align her activities to what was meaningful to her – playing music. Through finding an opportunity to do so within a collective environment, Riley's sense of positive identity was developed while also supporting her connection to others. Riley's sense of identity is reified by connection to youth around her who share her love of music. As Riley speaks about trying to find different ways of being herself, typical of the developmental age range she is in, the process of identity creation through group program participation is demonstrated. An opportunity to play music as a group does not just exist for fun, but can support participants in finding and developing their sense of self and supporting positive experiences of mental health in opposition to emotional challenges faced, such as during the pandemic.

5.9 The Social Justice Impact of Music Based Programs

Currently, there are attempts to undermine the language of social justice through discursive politicization of the term (Massarani & Chess, 2018). However, this shift is largely one of political perception, which cannot always mean that the use of language shifts and changes in response. As a social worker, I think that it is important to continue to use the term social justice as it serves as a call to action. In this context I define it broadly, as equitable access to socio-economic benefits - including access to mental health supports – for all, but with a special consideration given to those experiencing systemic barriers (CASW, 2005). Taking a social justice lens allows for the consideration of who is comparatively disadvantaged and how their needs and interests can be met. It is important to tie the outcomes of this study to social justice so that a more complete understanding of the influence of music programs can be developed.

As a researcher, the extent to which financial access to musical programming was a barrier for youth participants was surprising. It was common for the youth who participated in this study to have financial barriers to accessing musical education outside of school, and very limited options within school. For youth with a disability, a challenge finding programs where they could participate without skill based barriers to access was common. While it was expected that youth's access to the type of training provided by the studied sites would be unique, the extent of barriers to any type of musical training was very consistent and more problematic than expected. This was especially relevant regarding access to musical training that could continue to offer youth opportunities as they age. My professional experience of working in schools providing group-based preventative mental health supports was in a relatively privileged community (St. Albert),

and I was unaware how little musical training many youth living in poorer neighbourhoods in Edmonton have access to.

Most participants who named school-based accessibility to music programs as a barrier related this to their school as being small or under-resourced. This aligns to the intent within YONA and SOM to target geographic areas of neighbourhoods and schools with youth who have limited options. Specifically, three youth spoke about having no access to musical training in schools and another spoke about very limited options. While dependent on the school the participant attended, many youth shared that Junior High was a specific time in their education without consistent access to music-based programs. This limitation can preclude youth from being able to participate in musical education in high school and beyond due to administrative barriers as the participants shared that they are required by school administration to have prior musical experience to enroll in many music courses in high school, such as band. Additionally, given musical training in Junior High occurs during a formative time, limited opportunities can preclude youth from realizing their full interests in music, even for those who have felt strongly towards music in the past. Riley said, "I already knew, I really liked music, I knew like things like that, but I hadn't seen it the same way in a long time because I hadn't gotten to interact with it, like school doesn't have, especially with my school, it's a small school, we don't have a band program, so this [program] kind of in a way provided that for me and it helped a lot". While it is unclear how widespread this challenge is for youth in Edmonton generally, participants in this study tended to come from poorer neighbourhoods and go to less-resourced schools, and consistently experienced a lack of musical education in school as a barrier. All three programs intend to allow youth who would otherwise not

have the experience to participate in music based programs through providing it free of charge and with a program philosophy that is inclusive and adaptive to youth needs.

There was a recognition by some participants that these programs provide access to music for youth with financial and accessibility barriers and related it to social justice. When asked who the program would be a perfect fit for, Lynn shared "people living like under the poverty line, people struggling with money". Elliot shared a growing understanding of the purpose of the program: "I think it took me a little while to realize…I went to a poor elementary school…YONA started at that school because that's who it was for… and I think the social impacts of the program really hit me as I got a bit older…[they] are really important". Elliot shared that they noticed the social impacts of providing youth with something to do after school by keeping busy, and being exposed to opportunities, such as playing in orchestra, they would not have been able to experience without the program. Both of these participants who readily spoke to how these programs provided access for youth with financial barriers shared an awareness of the limitations poverty creates within their own lives and the lives of those they know. From a perspective of youth with disability, Stephanie's mother shared an accessibility challenge of a lack of specialized programs for her daughter who has autism, with many in-school programs primarily filled with boys. Stephanie and her mother shared that the program allows her access to musical training as well as connection to girls her age both of which were barriers prior to program participation. All three programs provide the opportunity to participate in their programming without charge, supporting those with financial barriers to access musical education.

The participants of this study understand music as "a deep thing" (Andre), saying that "your spirit can be down if you haven't found something you can connect with; music is that for me" (Kelsey). They see music as something timeless, for example Lynn who said, "music is one of like the oldest things that we can observe, music has been a thing for thousands of years…I feel like everybody deserves to experience music in one way or another because it's so timeless". Considering the cultural importance youth place on music, the demonstrated positive experiences youth can have at music-based programs including mental health, self-efficacy, and identity, and the lack of equitable access to group-based music programs due to attending under-resourced schools, access to music-based programs can be considered a matter of social justice. This study has found that community-based music programs that target youth who would not otherwise have the opportunity due to positional barriers such as poverty or disability meet the needs of youth in the community. I position this as an important social justice intervention. These programs support positive community processes by offering participants this opportunity at no charge, and their unique group processes are well-suited to support youth development across areas of mental health, identity, and a sense of self-efficacy. The majority of funding for these programs comes from private donors and fundraising, which allows for youth to attend free of charge. This is an admirable outcome, and also appears to be non-government provision of services that are lacking due primarily to music inaccessibility in schools which is the responsibility of the government. If done well, these programs can change the lives of youth and community fabric can change, leading to experiences that are better for everyone. This research supports advocacy for increased government funding for music programs to support youth mental health.

Music-based community programs, targeted towards youth who would not otherwise

have the opportunity, can serve as important pathways to improving the lives of youth

who would not have otherwise had the chance.

Chapter 6: Discussion

Music-based mental health programs in a community setting offer youth unique pathways to experiences of a growing sense of self-efficacy, identity development, and a positive sense of mental health. The programs in this study create these experiences with youth through being accessible, safe spaces that communicate to youth that they are valued for who they are, and create an environment of supported risk taking, leading to growth in the dual areas of musical and social ability. These findings echo Harkins et al. (2016) who found that belonging and friendship were benefits of participation in orchestras, and aligns with Choi (2010) in seeing the use of group work (especially small groups) as integral to supporting social benefits of program participation. While the structures of the three programs reflected upon for this study varied, the participants consistently spoke about the importance of how the structure was applied. Specifically, youth choice, scaffolded learning opportunities, and staff use of power in a youth centric way resulted in positive experiences for the participants. These results align closely to a study comparing facilitator styles which found that semi-structured democratic models where youth voice and choice were prioritized within a framework created and facilitated by the adults in the environment were the most beneficial for reducing stress and depression (Levi & Travis, 2020), as well as research demonstrating the importance of youth ownership in programming decisions (Cain et al., 2016). Tensions within group, such as balancing a focus on it being an environment both for socializing and musical training, are resolved through close attention to youth needs by teachers and a genuine interaction style which minimizes their power differences – supported by a love for music shared by youth and teachers. The importance of connection to program staff was

consistent with previous research (Hesnan & Dolan, 2017). These experiences are often

offered repetitively within the context of reciprocal relational responsibilities, which

playing music as a group appears uniquely suited to offer. Opportunities of relying on

each other while challenging themselves to create music together supports consistent co-

opportunities for learner-leader experiences which provide an opportunity for youth to

develop a strong sense of self-efficacy and increased positive sense of identity. These

elements, initially temporally and spatially specific to the music program setting, seem to

become embodied within their sense of self and ways of being in the world through

repeated opportunities for these types of experiences which open up possibilities for new

opportunities outside of the program, such as risk taking and engagement with challenge,

resulting in increased positive sense of mental health, identity and sense of self-efficacy.

The participants of this study reported that programs are experienced differently

by youth based on their social position and context, with increased sensitivities to

different aspects of programs based on who they are. The participants with disabilities

tend to experience friendship as a challenge within the program and outside of it, and yet

can have beneficial social experiences within group. These music-based programs allow

for social interaction, and a sense of collective experience that does not rely on aspects

these youth find challenging such as verbal communication. The participants who are

gender non-binary and transgender expressed greater awareness and sensitivity towards

contexts of safety within the program, consistently speaking to the importance of

relationships with teachers and group values of acceptance, resulting in it being easier to

be themselves at their program in comparison to other areas of their lives. Participants

who shared challenges within hierarchical expectations of the school environment found

program philosophies of sharing power with youth to fit their needs. In a similar process, participants who found social situations to be challenging outside of group found programs to be a space of social acceptance and friendship. These elements demonstrate that the experiences of programs are specific to the social context and positionality of youth participants and that these programs meet the needs of these youth in a unique way.

Music-based community programs provide access for youth who would otherwise have limited options for music-based programming. Through removing barriers to entry for youth due to poverty or disability, these programs contribute to social justice on a community level. Many participants shared barriers to accessing music in their lives through a school setting. Two youth mentioned that the cost of musical training would otherwise be a barrier for their families. For these participants, the program exists as a unique pathway to musical access, allowing youth who would not have otherwise had a chance to receive the benefits associated with group participation. Music holds an important place in youth subculture (Stehlik et al., 2020), and these programs can be seen to offer youth access to culturally meaningful experiences through participation in group musical experiences. Music-based, mental health oriented community programs support youth experiences of mental health, self-efficacy and identity, and through unique program processes and targeting youth with barriers to access, such as poverty or disability, contribute to social justice on a community level.

6.1 Future Areas of Research

This study focused on music-based community programs that address mental health, wellness, or other benefits in addition to musical development. It would be interesting to see if these commitments to using music as a tool to support the whole

person is a distinguishing feature for particular group processes. This study, while considering aspects of positionality, was small and exploratory. Increased research about program specific impacts related to youth's positionality, and the processes that support them, could expand an understanding of program benefits for particular populations. As these programs targeted youth with barriers to access to traditional musical training (poverty and disability) it would be interesting to explore if the functionality of program processes are specific to the needs of the youth who come, or a fit for youth more broadly who may not face these barriers. This study demonstrated benefits of programs being separate from other aspects of the participants' lives. For future research, it would be interesting to see to what extent program benefits are specific to a community setting, and if a program like this could work successfully if embedded into other systems, such as schools. Considering that challenges faced by youth in this study were often related to a lack of privilege, future research could explore the extent to which program experiences are reliant on participants' relative sociocultural position, considering how best to embed these types of opportunities in the lives of more youth.

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Appendix A

Interview Guide

Factual

- Tell me a bit about yourself – how old are you? How long have you been coming to group? How did you find out about it? Why did you choose this program, and not another?

- Tell me about what you do at group… what's a typical day at group? What types of activities do you do?

Group Dynamics

- What's the vibe of the group? [Can you describe the dynamics of the group?] How can you tell?

- Do you feel accepted in this group? Why or why not?

- Do you find group to be a comfortable experience? What makes it comfortable? Has it always been that way? How does who this experience relate to who you are?

Experience Related to Music

- How do you use music in your life? What role does it play?

- How does music relate to your wellbeing? (in group, outside of group?)

- How does music affect your relationships? (in group, outside of group?)

- Has your relationship to music changed since coming to group? If so, how? What about the program supported this change?

Experience Related to Mental Health

- Has participation in this group changed the way you consider your mental health? If so, how? What about group supported this change?

- How has participation in this group affected the different parts of yourself? (spiritual, emotional, physical, mental)

- Has participation in group effected how you act or think outside of group? How so?

- Has participation in this group supported you in dealing with challenges in your life? How/in what way?

Group Structure

- Sometimes programs are quite structured, or more open… how would you describe this group? How does the fact that this group is run openly/highly structured influence your experiences of the program?

- How are choices made at group, for example, what you'll do that day? How much choice do you have?

- How do the actions that staff take at group effect your experience of group? Other participants actions? Yours?

- Are there any aspects of the program that it just wouldn't be the same without? Do you think that's true for everyone?

Experience

- What has been your experience of being a part of this group?

- What's your favourite part of coming to group? What makes that possible?

- Is there anything that you wished would happen within group that doesn't?

- Are there any challenging parts to be a part of this group?

- When you first came to the group, how was it? Did it change over time? Why/why not?

- How does your experience at this program compare to other programs that you've been to?

- Does the use of music change how it's been for you being a part of this group? How so?

Comparative/Positionality

- Would you say that most people attending this group are like you, or are there lots of different people? How can you tell?

- Who do you think this program would be (most) helpful for?

- Do you feel/think that you come to group for a similar reason as most people here?

- Do you think there are any socio-demographic differences in the way you and your peers experienced the program? Why?

Debrief

- Do you have anything else you would like to add?

- Was there anything in this activity you did not understand?

- Is there anything you would like to add that we have not discussed?

- Has anything upset you or that you would like to talk to someone about?

- Do you understand what will happen with the information you have provided here today? Do you have any concerns about that?

Appendix B

REB Approval

DALHOUSIE UNIVERSITY

Social Sciences & Humanities Research Ethics Board
Letter of Approval

September 02, 2022
Joey Shaughnessy
Health\School of Social Work

Dear Joey,

REB #:   2022-6249
Project Title: Youth Mental Health and Music Oriented Community Based Programs: A Constructivist Grounded Theory Approach

Effective Date: September 02, 2022
Expiry Date: September 02, 2023

The Social Sciences & Humanities Research Ethics Board has reviewed your application for research involving humans and found the proposed research to be in accordance with the Tri-Council Policy Statement on *Ethical Conduct for Research Involving Humans.* This approval will be in effect for 12 months as indicated above. This approval is subject to the conditions listed below which constitute your on-going responsibilities with respect to the ethical conduct of this research.

Sincerely,

Dr. Megan Bailey
Chair, Social Sciences and Humanities Research Ethics Board
Dalhousie University

DALHOUSIE UNIVERSITY

Social Sciences & Humanities Research Ethics Board
Amendment Approval

January 10, 2023

Joey Shaughnessy
Health\School of Social Work

Dear Joey,

REB #:   2022-6249
Project Title: Youth Mental Health and Music Oriented Community Based Programs: A Constructivist Grounded Theory Approach

The Social Sciences & Humanities Research Ethics Board has reviewed your amendment request and has approved this amendment request effective today, January 10, 2023.

Sincerely,

Dr. Megan Bailey
Chair, Social Sciences and Humanities Research Ethics Board
Dalhousie University